THE TWELVE-WINDED SKY

Essays

by

E. L. WOODWARD

"I have written of my rooms in Oxford, and the setting and daily routine of my life; a return to London, where I was at school, and first knew the freedom of great books; journeys to and from the West of England, and places which I have known for many years."

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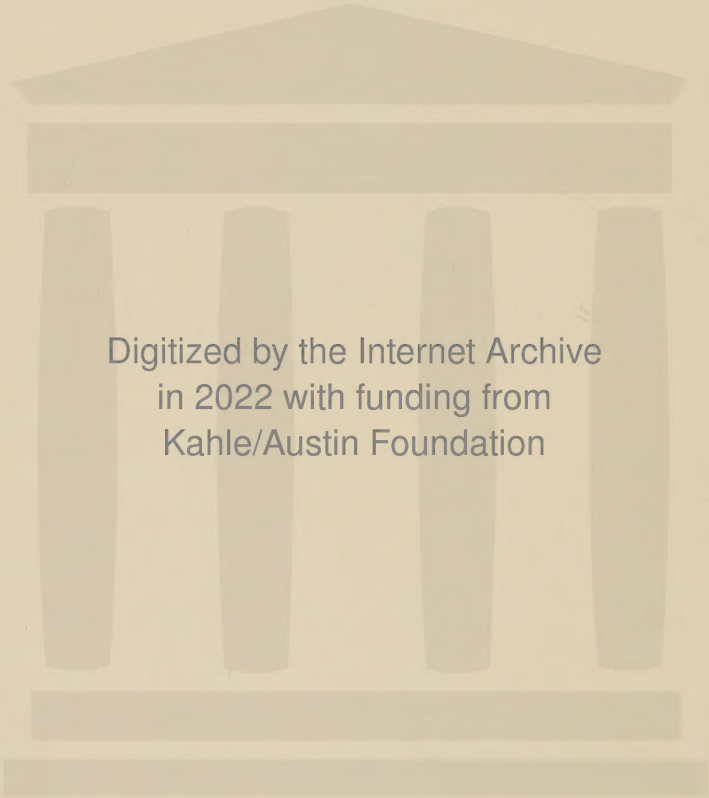
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From far, from eve and morning
And yon twelve-winded sky,
The stuff of life to knit me
Blew hither : here am I.

The author is indebted to Mr. A. E. Housman for permission to print a stanza from "The Shropshire Lad" at the head of these essays.

TO-DAY, March 14, 1930, I walked in New College garden. The afternoon was dark; a cold rain was falling; at the time of sunset the garden was empty. A tumult of the coming of spring filled with its reverberance and excitement the quietness of the walled irregular lawns. Along the verge of the path and under the beech tree near the last bastion of the city wall, there ran a scattered fire of crocuses, saffron, purple, and white, a trail of little flames laid mischievously in a wide circle.

For a time I stood in the shelter of the great beech tree, watching the course of the rain down its twigs and branches, the beads of water at the tips of the leafbuds. A blackbird flew from one of the chestnut trees to bathe and splash in a pool, and then sped up again with a warning cry as I came out into the open lawn. The glistening branches, the stone of the walls, Magdalen Tower seen from the angle to the north of the garden gate (*Manners makyth man*), lightened or reflected the steel-grey colour

of the clouds; a pattern of steel in shadow, steel in darkness, steel brandished over the sea. Here was no Italian spring riding the Mediterranean towards a land of green promontories, no shower of roses, no goddess in the mists of morning, with the young winds learning their craft, and golden strands of hair girding the fertility of life. Here winter had been stronger; here was the directness, the sharpness of swords, the turbulence of armies, the violence and thrust of the swords which guarded the gates of Paradise. The constellations of crocuses were brightest in the extreme south of the garden. Just to the north of them I could see the unevenness in the lawn which marks the place where hospital tents were set in the war. For years these signs will be traced in the grass, renewed each spring until the memory of them is forgotten. Twelve years are gone since the doctors and nurses went away, and the door was closed in the south wall of the garden. At some time in a hundred months I had passed unawares the turning-point between the rising and falling of my life. Six years ago, in this very place, another generation had played the

Rhesus of Euripides, and on the city wall the goddess had appeared to claim the body of a slain man. Now I was here alone, with the noise and silence of the end of winter, the flashing of swords, the dropping of fire and liquid gold; the colour of dawn, the colour of dominion, the colour of death. These walls, now a memory and a name, were a defence of the town in troubled times. On such walls the old men walked in Troy, speaking of the beauty of Helen, and the evil which had come in the ships of the Achaeans.

When it grew dark, and the storm of the mind had given way to reasoning and an enquiry into the origin of things, I let my thoughts take me to the sun and his procession across the heaven, the movement of the planets towards some unknown stellar wilderness, along some immense circle of destiny. I remembered that a few hours earlier I had read of the finding of a planet whose wide orbit encircled the course of Neptune, and the lesser elliptical path of the earth, as the tidal waters of England surrounded this garden, and the life of the garden enclosed the pulsation and rhythm of my heart.

During the day no one had talked to me of this planet newly found; no one had spoken with fear of its coldness, and the long cycle of its solar year. In my time these discoveries are become too familiar both in the infinitely large and the infinitely little. Through the polishing of glass and the refraction of lenses we have made charts and symbols of death, explored the recesses of the elements, and followed the passage of the swiftest physical changes in the bodies of living things. I wondered what name would be given to this planet, what final terms would denote the tiniest of animalculae making their faint spirals and circles and broken lines on microscopic slides. If I thought of the common names of men, I could not easily imagine that a right distinction might be given to these portents of distance, or the enveloping hosts of disease. I do not know which is the more elusive; the remotest star, scarcely impinging upon our terrestrial light, or this chiaroscuro of amoebic and bacillic life, shifting and unstable, yet adamantine in obedience to some primal beginning and rule of order.

In this quest of names and terms to express new

relationships, and the inversion of common values, there is need of words that will reach beyond the technical record of measurement and quantity and attain to a final interpretation; though whether this interpretation be good or evil I have no power to know. Neither can I be sure that I have escaped the false reasoning of the old magicians, the workers of spells who attempted to bind to men's purposes the forces of the world, and to enslave God by the pronouncement of His name.

For a year and more I have been sharply aware of the unfamiliarity of once friendly things. Too often I have noticed the freakishness, the mocking look which a man finds in his own house when a calamity has befallen him.[1] I see the world, suddenly, as I may see it when I am

[1]I think that Thomas Hardy, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, has described this terrible unfamiliarity more clearly than any other modern writer. "The complexion even of external things seemed to suffer transformation as her announcement progressed. The fire in the grate looked impish—demoniacally funny, as if it did not care in the least about her strait. The fender grinned idly, as if it too did not care. The light from the water-bottle was merely engaged in a chromatic problem. All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration. And yet nothing had changed since the moments when he had been kissing her; or rather, nothing in the substance of things. But the essence of things had changed." (Wessex edition, page 293.)

dying: a change of proportion, a transformation of emphasis, a new relevance, when time is too short for understanding; an empty city, open to the plunder of an enemy breaking through at one gap in the wall, while the defenders at the furthest gate are in retreat from the treacherous bulwarks; the carrefours of the city are silent, and, in palace gardens, there is nothing to break the sound of the wind or the singing of birds in the avenues of trees.

I have written down at odd times (I have had little leisure to explore these moods) an account of the procession of images which flow through my mind when I think about the world and the stream of time. I do not pretend that there is a coherence in this succession of forms and shapes and symbols. I have not ventured upon philosophical discussion or logical analysis. I have done no more than describe the appearance of things; if it were not a little absurd, I should say the appearance of things in my mind the moment after I had seen them. I have no power to attempt an explanation. The months of the year bring me no nearer to an

understanding of their meaning. This year's spring is more strange than the spring of last year, strange and unfamiliar as the rise and fall of life on the floor of the ocean. I know that any record must be fragmentary; that the act of writing comes subtly as a barrier between the active and passive moods of the mind. The searching of one's memory is like a return to a ballroom after the dancers have left, and the servants of the house are putting out one by one the lights in the shining candelabra. I have had no purpose beyond the simplicity and directness of a child's questions. I have taken for granted the confusion of the age into which I was born, the immensity of the gulf dividing my childhood from the middle years of my life; the charity of our present agnosticism which can condemn only cowardice, intolerance, cruelty, and knows few virtues other than pity and courage and steadfastness.

I notice that I have chosen to describe days of climatic extreme and contrast; the summer and winter solstices, the turn of the year towards autumn or spring. These images which I have remembered come into the quiet mind, and

vanish quietly, as the wake of a ship is lost in the sea and the horizon. I might compare the rapidity of their coming and going to a continuous flight of arrows; the falling of rain; wind blowing across a cornfield in summer, when the high air is tranquil and soundless, yet there is for ever a rustling, a sibilance of motion across the spiked heavy ears and bending stalks. These images have little reference to the boundaries of time and the order of happening of terrestrial things. The years, falling like stones into this deep lake of consciousness, make but a widening circle on the level water. The secret of my own personality escapes me as completely as the secret of the universe; yet I can put no limit to my identity. Even the imperfection of the human instrument seems to me as irrelevant as it must seem to most reflecting men; this imperfection is no more than the shadow of the arch between life and death. I am confined to my body as I might make myself a willing prisoner on a ship voyaging between two continents.

The procession of images never halts on the borderline of active consciousness; it is most

vivid on the threshold of forgetfulness, and often accompanied to the double gates of darkness and sleep by a vision of masks and faces and shapes, floating from left to right across the closed eyes. I do not often find in the stream of thoughts and images any shadow of actions willed or accomplished, foiled or desired; the ripple of love or hate, or passion or remorse or fear. There is indeed a sensuous pleasure in this contemplation; the pleasure of silence, a pleasure taken not in the images themselves, nor merely in the expectation of their coming; least of all in the intellectual search for their origin, and the hidden connection between things apparently remote and unjoined. It is possible that to other minds, and especially to minds of metaphysical power, trained in the observation of thought, I may appear to have wasted ink and paper in setting down a galimatias of words; a common mirage; wood that is useless for building, and can never be shaped into wheels or boxes for carrying and storage; stubble of a crop gathered long ago by wiser hands.

I have written of my rooms in Oxford, and the

setting and daily routine of my life; a return to London, where I was at school, and first knew the freedom of great books; journeys to and from the west of England, and places which I have known for many years. Once or twice only I have been indifferent to any place, and followed the thoughts suggested by the reading of books. To the familiar routine of my life there was added during the twelve months a voyage to Egypt. One evening after my ship had turned northwards towards the English Channel I wrote down the impressions of this voyage, and of Egypt.

I have said little of people. This unfamiliarity, this self-awareness which has come upon the world, sets a problem which is in the first degree intellectual; begetting, conceiving, and all the happenings within the closed circle of personal relationships have little to do with its solution. I stand within this circle, knowing its fragility; my heart stops when I remember that the circle must be broken. Yet I know that for my purpose I must look at the world as a mapmaker who draws his townships and cities, fields and farms.

In this making of maps, and above all the maps of countries imagined in the mind, provinces rising and falling for league upon league from sea to sea, I have always found a master work. It may be that the immensity to which the walled garden is open, the heights no tower can reach, will some day be charted with a precision beyond the skill of astronomers and the present categories of their thought. Until this time, the mind must wander about its once familiar domain; enduring a ruin unroofed, restless with the noise of wind; timbers rotten with damp and the worm, a calamitous and inhospitable home.

I

HERE, where two windows look east, and two look west over grey and green, over gardens and buildings, it is easy to see that our words have failed us; that they are the instruments of a less subtle time, nets with too wide a mesh to catch the moonlit significance of things. Nothing has been changed for a century and a half in the main pattern of the view eastwards or westwards from my windows; the colours of the stone have deepened; the sharper lines fade more easily into the sky; trees have been planted, and trees have fallen; but on a clouded night I may lean out, here into the fourteenth, there into the eighteenth century.

Why should so much care be given to keep these old shapes, and faithfully to copy every curve of the stone against time and dissolution? When these buildings were new, there was no such trouble about mending the work of another age. The men who first lived in these rooms, the Fellows of All Souls whose fathers

had seen the change of dynasty in England, wanted to pull down the founder's quadrangle. Hawkesmoor, who was Wren's pupil, spoke for "the preservation of antient durable public buildings that are strong and usefull." For these plain reasons he would keep the old work; not for the finer half-spoken reasons we might give. Why do we keep Hawkesmoor's work? Not for any beauty of design in these twin towers; not for an external decoration which is preposterous, elaborate, a literary censor's idea of form. We care nothing for the memory of Hawkesmoor's employers. A traveller to Oxford at the time when Codrington's legacy from the wealth of his plantations in Barbadoes was being spent on the new library wrote of the resident Fellows of the College as "for the most part worthless" and in no way deserving of such a "palace."

We renew the outer stone, we make a show of believing that nothing has changed, that there will be no change, because so much else in the world has escaped us, and we are afraid. A man setting out on a long journey will walk round the well-known rooms of his house, and

see in a broken latch or some worn piece of furniture the symbol of all that is familiar. Already he hears about him the harsh sounds of sea-birds and ships, or watches the mist-hung capes of his new country loom up on a strange morning.

We are made anxious by that unexplained tension of mind which comes before some leap forward in human evolution. We cannot turn back; yet we are leaving all that we know. Day after day I have watched from this room the refacing of Queen's College library. The whole front is of new stone; line upon line as its architect planned it nearly two hundred and forty years ago. Another eagle crowns the pediment; every statue in every niche along the base is copied carefully and well. All this laboured industry of self-delusion, this study to keep some symbol of duration in the becoming and becoming of the generations cannot hide our failure. In the acts of our ceremonial of continuity, as in our words, the whole significance eludes us, dances away from us in patterns of light, moves as a tidal sequence of nights and days, mocks at us with wind

tearing down trees, or shafts of rain piercing into stone, tempts us with the everlasting trickery of spring and summer. The very ways of corruption and death are out of our reach. Between the angle of Queen's and New College I can see two dying trees in a garden: every year their high branches curve down more narrowly to the trunks, more steeply to the earth. Yet this slow return of life to its home in the soil has nothing of the hideousness, the outrage of the decay which must feast on me. Who can find a language for this difference, for this elusiveness? Or if words are found for the outer form, they are the terms of a new science; a speech which has never fought under a master of writing, never learned the ways of an old society. I take one book out of a hundred. Who can read Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* without thinking of those armies of men with eastern helmets and new-shaped swords who came through the Caucasian passes with Jenghis Khan? These invaders are here now to settle as well as to overthrow.

Looking out at New College tower I can watch

the gathering of these clouds as surely as I might watch a storm climb from the valleys to hide the ranges of the Alps. One of the mediaeval lanes of Oxford, in its course curiously like a lightning flash, passes the tower and the cloisters, and runs between New College and Queen's. Here the high walls echo and keep the sound of words longer than they are held in a wide modern street. Here, when the tower was built, men might yet talk easily of logical terms; the schoolmen had divided and redivided the world and all the categories of thought; almost at every gate was set a stone image of the mercy of God in human form. After two centuries came a signal of the end, in a language which had not been heard for many centuries of years. . . . "We are such stuff as dreams are made on. . . ."

There was quiet again for a time. These other buildings were made, and clearness and certainty seemed to have come back with them. Once more men might walk through this lane from end to end, and if the images of divine pity were gone, the burden of judgment and the fear of the last things had gone with them.

A second signal appeared; the invaders were nearer. . . .

"The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind and rolls its rapid waves." . . .

Now even these fiery planets of our system of thought move in a darkness which flows out beyond the more distant stars; these points of light are contained and yet lost in an immensity for which we can find measurement but no meaning.

If my curtains are drawn, and I leave the trees and the stones, and look within the room foursquare, there is the same unfamiliarity. I might find the name of the first Fellow to whom this set of rooms was allotted by the College. But I have no real care for him; I only think that I might know something of this process of time if I could ask him the simplest questions. Did he paint the panelling white, or did he add a slight colouring, to take away the deadness and coldness of the walls? Did he fill the room with books, or did he leave the

bevelled lines and fine spaces unbroken by bookcases? Light green was the fashion of his time. My staircase has always been painted a light green; but his colour is too faded and mine is too new. He might have used most of my furniture. My table was made in his day; now it is gnarled and uneven; its oak graining is full of tiny ravines, crevasses, and emptied lakes. I have a hanging candelabra of gilt, with six electric candles. He would have praised these sham candles; no snuffing, no gutting, no tapers; a switch at the door, and an unbroken light. My writing-desk would have been old in his father's time; he would have thought it old-fashioned, but there would have been no strangeness in the drawer for quill pens and sand. He would find my mirror elegant though tarnished; he would have chosen its place between two panels and above a curved settee which he might have bought. The clumsy comfort of my armchairs would have pleased him. From November to March when these four windows and two doors—great doors with pediments over them—make geometric patterns of the wind I bring my chair to the fire.

(I dreamed some time ago that he had unfolded a Chinese screen of red lacquer between the east windows and the hearth: I must copy him in this.) Then I can see one half of the Radcliffe camera—the noblest dome in England—as an architectural drawing, planned and not yet built, built and yet changing with every hour of the light.

He cannot answer my questions. Therefore I have looked at the pictures and books of his time. Here perhaps I might find why things were plain and familiar to him, and are strange to me; the reason for his easy rule, and my furtive exploration.

In 1773 the University Almanach, a loyal print with a view of Oxford framed above a list of the kings of England, and the lesser sovereigns of the University, a calendar of local events, and the feasts of western Christendom, chose to represent the private garden of the Warden of New College. This garden is reached by a bridge from the Warden's

Lodgings in Queen's Lane, and has boundaries unlike those of any other garden. On one side is the mediaeval lane; to the north is the old gabled barn of the college, carelessly hacked about to give a few more rooms to the Lodgings. Beyond the southern wall are the breweries of Queen's and All Souls; to the west, and rising to a fair height are Hawkesmoor's buildings and the east window of the Codrington library. In the picture the whole background is taken up by this mass of stone and its three lines of windows. One of my windows on the top storey is open, but no one is looking out on the garden; the owner of the room has lost his only chance of immortality. There is a summer house at the south end of the garden—an unfriendly shelter which looks away from the sun, and must always have been used as a store for garden tools. Along the walls are flower beds, a few fruit trees, and an encircling gravel path; the centre is a lawn of unsymmetrical shape, broken by two or three oblong garden beds. When the drawing was made the Warden and his lady were walking in the garden. The Warden's clerical bands and

dark coat appear as a distant and sardonic symbol of God walking in the garden of Paradise; the idea of the apostolic succession reaching backwards through these men of good digestion, through zealous or simoniacal bishops, away past all the high Gothic beauty, past the squat buildings and frightened relic-worship of the dark ages, to the peacocks, the decorated capitals, the borrowed mosaics of Romano-Byzantine Christianity. The Warden's lady has the significance of the garden to which she belongs. She was young enough in 1773 to find delight in the flowers. But she lives, like the flowers, only between the earth and the sun. She is joined by law to the Warden, as the garden is his domain by right of parchments and formulae; yet he seems no more than one of the odd sequelae of Levantine religious experience, while she has nothing of a particular age or time. The division between the active and passive elements of the picture is sudden enough; there are two gardeners at work, young men with three-cornered hats, and knee breeches; wearing no coats, but keeping their rough shirts fastened at the wrist.

One is sweeping leaves from the lawn; the other is sharpening a scythe—sharpening a scythe for the University Almanach of 1773, when Napoleon was a child in Corsica, and Rousseau saw "all the states of Europe hurrying to their ruin."

This morning I saw Hancock, the New College gardener, tidying his flower beds for next year, bending over the lawn, working as the man who swept the leaves. For all its antiqueness the print of 1773 was easier to understand. All Hancock's actions seemed to be a preparation for something which neither he nor I could know. He might have been some inn servant in Bethlehem, fetching and carrying for the history of the world. We were helots making ready for our masters; monks copying love-songs in a language which we could not read. A load of the commonplaces of philosophy came through my mind; *the one and the many*, *omnis determinatio est negatio*. . . . I thought of the launching of a thousand ships; the continual setting sail of the generations; the passions, obscure, curiously shameful, which maintain the continuity of life; the thousand million

heart-beats which separate me from the gardeners in the picture—but how, and why? the rhythm of human consciousness; the slower time of the garden; the half-noticed crumbling of the stone.

For all these things there must be a new language; the metaphors and likenesses of our speech are but flame shadows in a cave. Yet I could hear nothing but the hammer-sounds, and the sawing of the stone which is to refashion Queen's library as it was made in the beginning; as though there were no rhythm in things, no infinity of duration; as though a building might be solid, comfortable, complete; as though nothing depended upon the movement of the stars; as though there were no strangeness; as though words were closely packed, irresistible, a victorious armada hiding the face and the depth of the sea.

II

On a market day in Oxford the sheep and cattle are driven down Holywell against a line of quickly-moving traffic. They belong to the routine of the week's business, these frightened herds, clattering above the ragged noises of the street, bunched together in fear of a whirring and cracking motor lorry, looking for shelter on pavements strange to the touch, or house-walls dabbled with colours new to these soft stupid eyes; eyes lit now with a terror I have seen in men's eyes when the town of Salonika burned from its Byzantine fortress to the Aegean sea-front; a light in the eyes as different from the fire of battle as are the shouts of the shepherds and cowmen from a war-cry. These poor beasts follow the by-ways to the market; though, for pity, they see a little green in the churchyard of St. Mary Magdalen, just beyond the ditch where the martyrs were burned.

I know that men are kinder than they once were. I know that this *auto da fé* is the condition

of an animal's life; that the cattle might never have known the warm darkness of their barns, the plentifulness and long satisfaction of summer pastures, contentment by trees or the banks of rivers, if men had not needed them for this last end. Yet did St. Augustine consider the destiny of other living things when he wrote of the relation of man to God; "Thou has made us for Thyself." Is there another meaning to the priest's inception of the Mass; *Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam?* I know this terrible fecundity of life. I can reason that, by other standards, the beasts are less sensitive to pain; that in their world of consciousness there is no disgust as there is no laughter, no foreshadowing among the herds of the plain purpose of their journeys, no care for the lives of other creatures; little more than a perpetual awareness of present danger. I know too well that I carry their burden as well as my own; yet if I had to choose between not being and being, I would choose life. I have indeed chosen my part, if the word is not too arrogant, in this fecundity, and willed that I should share in this universal appetite. What

matters the knowledge that my death, if it be not in the play of chance, will come no less harshly than the death of the beasts, and will serve a less delicate feast; should I fear my destiny?

Dicam Deo: indica mihi cur me ita judices: numquid oculi carnei tibi sunt? Aut sicut videt homo, et tu videbis? Numquid sicut dies hominis dies tui, et anni tui sicut humana sunt tempora? Et scias quia nihil impium fecerim, cum sit nemo qui de manu tua possit eruere.

These little processions hurrying to the market are kept away from the High Street, and therefore do not pass by the University church. There is no ceremonial reason for this; no belief that Zeus has a bad conscience about white oxen; no change in the habits of the sons of Eli. The side road is given to cattle because of the confusion of traffic in Oxford; so many men moving quickly to multiply their possessions; so much preoccupation with the little business of living, so much care for children, so much lust, so much guffawing about the

processes of birth and becoming; an accumulation of speed and machinery, a thwarting of the hour which cannot be patient with the slow and irrelevant movements of beasts.

The cattle are saved, perhaps, from a little of their unreasoning fear. There is no set purpose in this economy, but I find in it a certain relief. The University church is still the nominal centre of a life of preparation for the service of God and man in the state. The irony would be too great if these poor symbols of the law of devouring were mixed with more solemn signs of majesty, if the clip-clop of their hooves drifted through the church doors. Such a sound would indeed be out of tune on the days when a masterful sermon is preached to the bare galleries and benches. What richness and abundance of irony if sheep and oxen should break the peace of the assize sermon. Here is the judge, dressed almost as Jeffreys was dressed. The old penal code is gone; the prisons have long been visited by reformers; the theory of punishment, the scale of heinousness, the harshness of penalties are changed; but here is the grey wig, the scarlet gown which the

farm labourers might have seen in 1834; their last view of the justice of England before they were transported to a continent where even the stars of a winter night were strange. The civil officers are here; the high sheriff wears a sword. Men may think differently now of sovereignty; men may say that the idea of power over human beings has given way to the idea of the administration of things; but here before God let there be a sword; are not a thousand years in His sight no more than a day? These royal deputies enter with pomp a church empty save for a tourist anxious to see where in a strong hour Cranmer shamed his captors. They meet the Vice-Chancellor and the Proctors of the University; learning is the shield and servant of order. From a rood-screen—where long ago the figures of a man and a woman watched the enactment of a judge's sentence—four or five hired voices sing "God save the King." Then the preacher reads the bidding prayer in which are commemorated the names of benefactors, and the royal authority is proclaimed supreme in all cases throughout the dominions of the crown. The

fanfare of trumpets which meets the judge would be a familiar sound to most of these benefactors; the kings and queens of England; "rich men furnished with ability, living peaceably in their habitations."

There follows a sermon. The prisoners have long breakfasted in their cells; they have time for reflection while their judge is admonished. Admonished of what? Of the freedom of the will? Of the nice point where justice meets mercy? Of the philosopher universalising his actions? Is this a time for the lowing of herds? How awkward the thought that the driving of the beasts is an act of the general will; an act done by one man for all, as the law is expounded and judgment given by the religiously-admonished judge. How immoderate the conception; are we then all slaughtermen? Is every drover to be called as a witness at our trial? Where between the market, the church, and the walls of heaven do these universal acts, the bartering of cattle and the execution of a justice unbought, unsold, meet to form a pattern pleasing to immortal eyes? Is this cloth of lamentation woven beyond the moon?

From this celestial distance are the spires foreshortened to the level of the cattle pens? Let us unravel our own confusion; let us have a little peace from all this righteousness and all this justice of decisions, this harrying of man.

Qui quasi flos egreditur, et conteritur, et fugit velut umbra, et numquam in eodem statu permanet. Et dignum ducis super hujuscemodi aperire oculos tuos et adducere eum tecum in judicium? Recede paululum ab eo, ut quiescat, donec optata veniet sicut mercenarii dies ejus.

The assize sermons are spoken in no easy setting. I know of few buildings where there is more of the bitterness which chills the heart. I would plant the flower called Ruin of Rome among the stones and crevasses of the graveyard north of the church; for this bitterness loses its edge to resignation, and acceptance puts mockery to shame. Time has found here for his laughter a contrast between the visible and the real. The years have only added beauty to the church. Its tower has seen six centuries;

its spire rises from a group of pinnacles and statues refashioned and placed by cooler minds than those of the builders of the Gothic revival. A miller's son from Lanteglos in Cornwall rebuilt the chancel during the Wars of the Roses. The nave was made in the late fifteenth century when stone windows had become open channels of light. An ugly gallery, ugly and ill-placed seats have cumbered the wide space within the church, but outside nothing has been lost. A seventeenth-century porch to the south is untouched in form save where a Puritan soldier damaged a "very scandalous statue" of the Virgin patroness of the church.

Yet the heart is gone out of the building; its ways have not been set to the inevitable end of things; it has not known resignation. Therefore it is mocked by the changes which might have brought it peace. It has the distress of those who in old age make pretence to be young; spring and summer only bring desolation to it, as to a house where habit and familiarity have thrust out love.

In its earlier shape before ever it attained this beauty the church was a centre of life;

north of its low walls (in "the street of cats or mouse-catchers") there were settled illuminators, parchmenters, a bookbinder, a writer even in the time when the main stream of English students went to Paris. After the stream was turned to Oxford, the guild of Masters met in the church; the two "nations" from north and south of the Trent held their great days there; here, in sight of the altars and relics of the saints, the Irish fought the Scotch. Within this church clerks disputed a new philosophy in the years of excitement when the forgotten works of Aristotle were brought again to the west. Here even the staid elements of political government were learned; in the year 1314 majority rule was imposed upon the rival faculties. North of the church in 1320 was built the congregation house of the university; in a second storey were kept the books given under an uncertain bequest, and taken by force from Oriel College.

The splendid action of the Mass bounded the horizon of this lively world; the language of the Offices, garbled, over-familiar, confused with a tangle of jargon and superstition, yet

kept men's attention as in a play until to each in his hour the last collects for the dead brought an end of speaking and wrangling and living. Greater wealth had dispersed much of the overcrowded life among other buildings, the Divinity school, Duke Humfrey's library, the earlier colleges, before the tradition was broken. Now the old cycle of drama is no more repeated; there can be no return. God is withdrawn as far as man. The building is empty as a nursery when the children have left their home. I cannot find any one time for this change. It is hard to believe that those mediaeval churchmen who read the nocturns for the eve of All Souls never saw in this terrible sequence the transition between the known and the unknown, between the chapters from the book of Job which tell of the world as men know the world, and the chapters proclaiming a hope for which they have no more sanction than for any other fears of the dark. Yet if it is not possible to say of any one generation: here, when the learned saw this church, they heard already the brazen, sound-scattering trumpet of judgment, they imagined the great lights of

the heavenly city; or to say of another generation: now the end has come, they have seen their loneliness; if there was no day, no year, of sudden comprehension, nevertheless the tide has ebbed away as slowly as it rose, and for us the sun hangs mockingly over a wide flat land above the level of the sea.

The labours of exegesis, the controversies of scholars may still be centred on the date and authorship of a sentence, or the pagan authorities for a Christian miracle. Yet the heart knows now that it does not want these things to be true; that the old framework must be broken; the scale of belief must be transformed. The universe of the mind and the universe of things are greater than the old revelation. The study of Christian theology was once concerned with a life between sea and land; a "sapless foliage" on an unfertile shore, but within reach of the reviving waters. Now one who reads the Christian Fathers must climb some curious raised beach, dry it matters not how many years, and find only the fossils, the silt, the debris of old fangs: the dust of the beginnings of life.

New life may come, not through classification and time charts, but in the chance of things, the unending generosity of man to the unkindness of fortune; never again can it take the old shapes. Therefore all cathedrals and abbeys, all churches, even those churches which have done long service to knowledge, must know this end. They were well made for their time. Their altars and side-chapels were appropriated to every saint; their processional aisles and transepts reflected the long penitential chants; their walls and windows were coloured with images of holy living and dying. Until this beauty has undergone some frozen winter, some ice age of the human heart, until its content of piety has passed out of it as fully as the Greek piety has passed out of the Parthenon, there must be no attempt to break its spell, to awaken it from sleep. Christ was too kind to the tradition of the Jews. They saw to it that He suffered for this tenderness, and that their tradition lived to cloud over His new way. *Numquid non paucitas dierum meorum finietur brevi? Dimitte ergo me, ut plangam paululum dolorem meum; antequam vadam, et non revertar.*

I could wish this end to come soon. Better that the pain should be over, and better still that there should be no more of the mockery, the vanity of grafting the dead to the living. Already, for all the discipline and sacrifice of noble minds, the ruddiness of life is gone; the robes of preferments and benefices, articles of religion, priestly powers and absolution, hang loosely about the dying body. Week in, week out the flame grows fainter; the ashes of the fire are raked and re-raked. The litter of eighteen hundred years of history is tumbled out and re-picked; formulae of late Greek philosophers; Roman ideas of law and the transmission of power; a trust in magic; darker fears of vengeance and recompense; driftwood brought down by the full torrent of the stream. These attempts to bind the new with the old still turn, as they turned in Jerusalem, against the purposes of those who make them. Wesley once thought of a text for a sermon in the University church, but, with all his boldness, would not take it: "Now is the faithful city become an harlot." None the less the Pro-

testants, in the newness of their first discoveries, had used this language of Rome and the Popes.

If there were any doubt about this pity of Tithonus, this danger of entanglement in the dead optimism and virtue of the past, there is a warning near enough to us. Here in St. Mary's church Newman expounded a philosophy of negation and darkness. Newman's subtle and delicate-winged thought might have moved, as Lamennais moved, always towards the light. He might have interpreted the need of his time, but his voice never spoke the words of its own illumination. He chose to live in the palaces of Caiaphas, to find a good cause for Herod, and to see in Pilate the upholder of the world's order. Others have made this choice. It would be dishonest to doubt their honesty, arrogant to overlook their trouble and humbleness. But for me there is left behind a bitterness, an ironic laughter, where this man made his profession.[1]

[1] "I will not shrink from uttering my firm conviction that it would be a gain to this country, were it vastly more superstitious, more bigoted, more gloomy, more fierce in its religion than at present it shows itself to be."

Who shall say what may happen when the heart is free of these nets? Once it has digged and planted its own tree of knowledge, once it has taken its limits and found the borders of its world—who knows? If the fruit of knowledge be harsh, then is the love of the heart more precious because it is alone, unvalued except by men, untended except by courage. If the heart be held in so small a space for so short a time, it is worth all the thunder of heaven, and all the spaces of the stars. Its hour of overflowing beauty avails more than the planetary circles and the drift of the solar lights. Upon this unbared, geocentric isolation might be built a rule of pity which would take mockery and shame and cruelty from our way of life; a rule which would make men sensitive to all suffering, and put fear, unfriendliness, and dishonesty of mind as the last sins. Then after a long time, when their pretence of power is gone, and their authority is purged of terror, as the art of healing is purged of witchcraft, these towers and steeples might win back all that time ever gives back; a share in the honour, which we bestow largely, and without

hope of return, upon day and night, upon shape and colour and flame.

Quem vidistis, pastores? Dicite, annunciate nobis in terris quis apparuit?

III

BETWEEN Brasenose and Carfax on the north, between Oriel and Carfax on the south side of the High Street there are no collegiate buildings. The life of the street is transferred from the university to the city. The change is gradual; Ryman's picture shop, next door to Brasenose, draws its custom as much from the university and the county as from the citizens. Across the road, and separated from Oriel only by the Oxford shop of a London tailor, is a window showing *editions de luxe*. Within another hundred yards the change is almost complete; the food shops and the drapers close to Carfax, the booking offices of the bus company and the Great Western railway, are busy with a life dependent upon the geographical configuration of Oxfordshire rather than the culture of London and the public schools. There is too much road traffic for comfort. Three of the streets from Carfax lead to river bridges; the four ways run from London to Gloucester and south Wales, from Portsmouth

and Southampton to Birmingham and the north. The life of the city is drowned, especially in summer, by the noise and impeded by the bulk of lorries and cars from all the cardinal points. The bus traffic belongs to the place, and I should only dislike it (except for its ugly litter of tickets) if I were a small shopkeeper in the Cotswold towns or in the villages of the Cherwell valley. This maladjustment of the means of transport—overcrowded roads, a half-stagnant canal, and a railway never used to the full—is but the accident of a time. It does not ruin the pleasure of the shops. Indeed I doubt if there is much more noise than in the years when the street was paved with cobble stones. There is less dust, less mud, less jostling, and more courtesy of manners than any other generation has known.

The view changes at different heights. From the top of All Souls gate-tower the street is a narrow highway, soon lost in the surrounding hills; a jumble of roofs darker in their blue and grey than the glistening steel of the road; hardly distinct at the western end from Wytham woods and the sloping fields; part

of an England which is being slowly transformed by geological change; a new settlement in a newly-discovered country. From this gate-tower I can see how recent are great cities in human history. Little of the technique has been worked out; a city has still the appearance of a hasty refuge, without order on its fringes, unreconciled to the beauty of its horizons. This attempt to tame the world is bold enough; yet its courage is scarcely controlled by intelligence. The needs of sanitation and light and dryness of surface have been met; but the houses are spread in a chaos of unloveliness; the expression of an attorney's idea of property, without a sense of corporate harmony.

From the top of an omnibus, and above the level of the shops there is another life to be seen. Most of the shops are on the ground floor of older buildings. These older buildings, however little they may be matched together, have about them more sign of an educated tradition than the shop fronts below. The transition from the shop fronts is made sharply, with the large nameplate above the glass windows. Here and there sprawling letters of gilt are fixed to the

upper storeys; a repetition of the obvious which is an offence to the taste, a vertical as well as a horizontal spread of vulgarity. Only in two buildings in this western end of the High Street is there an unbroken sequence from roof to ground level; the Mitre Hotel and the Westminster Bank. The Mitre is likely to keep its antiqueness as part of its business goodwill. There is nothing of particular interest about it; the lines of its bay windows, its yellow and green colours are pleasant enough. The tourists are meant to think of a coaching inn; but these coaches were unshapely, bulging things. They have about them an uneasy suggestion of physical discomfort, of roughness and crudity of mind; cock-fighting; squat, bow-legged, red-faced men, and the smell of dung; horses quickly done to death in the race and competition for speed. Even if it were new, and free from the memory of the coarser side of Hanoverian England, the hotel would be restless as are all hotels in towns. Few come to these rooms tired with the good tiredness of long walking or climbing. There are too many rich men in rich cars; women with no kindness

in their middle-aged eyes; travellers spending an ill-planned day in a weariness of sight-seeing. The Westminster Bank has more attraction. Here is a building of the later Gothic revival and the age of Ruskin, in the style of the mediaeval churchmen who called usury a deadly sin; meanly built of grey and yellow brick with narrow stone mouldings and corbel heads of kings; small bearded faces vaguely like the Coburgs for whom Baron Stockmar made triumphant European marriages; a building which has become absurd in less than three generations. In the main hall of the bank there is a less self-conscious parody of mediaevalism. A thirteenth century doom picture is continually enacted, like an old play staged with modern dresses. Here against a crowded background are the scales in which the little souls are weighed, golden and silver and copper souls taken from their common graves and poured into the balances, crinkling, fictitious paper souls counted and set aside, though they would burn in a moment. Behind are the books of judgment; crimson-bound as though prefaced with warnings from Isaiah. Above each

open book sits a clerk, taking a record of the weighing; a scribe remote as the angels from the substance of good and evil chronicled in the books and weighed before this company. Messengers come to and fro from beyond the glass doors, outworks of Jerusalem. On my side of the counter of reckoning begins the freedom of the will, material for the recording books; powers of binding and loosing.

On a summer day the two sets of swing doors of the bank are open, and from the steps I can see the sunlight aslant the lines of figures and columns of accounts. Such figures as these were made under a fiercer light in India and Baghdad; the tables of multiplication were used by Chaldaean wise men to calculate the procession of the stars. These tiny, curious symbols have sailed in the curved ships of the Mediterranean, crossed over the Alpine and Pyrenean passes, moved westwards, following after several centuries the eastern titles and attributes of God. Here, on each side of the street, the invaders have settled, the later comers in the bank, the earlier in the city church.

Above the shop next to the bank is a blue cross, a robemaker's trade-mark, and once a crusader's symbol. For a moment, in the odd parallelism of things, I might take this cross to be the westernmost boundary of the double invasion from the east. In a crowded street these images follow too quickly for memory. Each shop has its own excitement; each group of shops its own sequence of associations. Music, jewels, opiates of tobacco and wine, silks and garlands; for a moment this academic street might be the gate of some Aegean island pleasant to Aphrodite of the many names; beyond Carfax there would be a garden with Priapus' image rose-wreathed; Keble and Pusey and all of them living at the very gates. In another mood I see fish shops and meat shops; grease and slices of red flesh; food kept narrowly from corruption, food in pyramids, food on ice, food packed in tins; relishes and sauces for food that men may eat more; knives and cauldrons, two-pronged and three-pronged forks, and all the mechanism of devouring. Here in this grossness is the law of life, and the reason for begetting and labour, for sleep and awakening; a law

obeyed willingly; a law most exquisitely observed by the birds as they poise and settle above pickings in the streets. I know how delicate, how lyrical I should find these bacon-shops if I were hungry. Nor is fear absent. I see watches and clocks; surplices and vestments of priests; painted figures of saints; books of prayer and lamentation; black clothes for mourning; the protection against cold and rain and night.

Sometimes the significance of the shops is lost in the mere play of light and colour. So unique, so new are the daily effects of light that I wonder if after sundown the memory of light vanishes as quickly as the memory of pain—do blinded men forget daylight? It is difficult to separate these effects from their physical accompaniments, to forget that fog is murderous to sensitive lungs, and to see it suffused with green and blue light and molten gold of every shade. There is rain from the south or south-west, changing from grey to silver as it falls with more violence, a shining flight of arrows. Sunlight is here a privilege; the gables and windows are built for snow and winter. Yet for

a few weeks in spring and summer there seems an infinite bounty of warmth and life until early in September, before the apples are ripe, a curious northern light comes into the sky, and the street seems too near to the polar silence;

> "And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
> As green as emerald."

I have gone out into the street after talking to my pupils on the elements of political economy. I have watched the buying and selling, and put the theory of marginal value to test, or rather, to observation. Then the street becomes a page out of a book, a statistical appendix. The whole commercial cunning of England is turned upon these few shops. There has been a calculation of a purchaser's scale of values, a reduction of the field of choice to a few dozen shapes and sizes; a confident neglect of the subtle particularities and differences which make up character; a parody, hollow and impudent, of the general will, and of the uniformity of virtuous acts. This proletariate of averages has something sinister about it. Here, brewed like beer in gallons, and casked in hogsheads, is a scent which one

man has thought to be the most fragile of his memories and the distillation of a single hour. Here are whole forests cut down for coffins, and a quarry full of gravestones. What is left after these averages are struck? Is our comfortable delusion of personality shivered into its constituent parts? But of what am I afraid? Why should not a thousand children play with a thousand similar boxes of toys? Must I have particular bricks, or a wooden horse all my own? Is love no more than possession, and liberty some private good? If wisdom lies in acceptance of life, and the limits of life, then I must meet these multiple shops, this wholesale forecast of the purchaser's desires with a wise resignation, a friendliness of response. For a moment this provincial street was lost in some economic process. I see in it now the triumph of human consciousness.

These moments of exaltation are among the best hours of the mind. Rousseau saw them in abstraction; but I need not go beyond this street. I watch the delicate adjustment of balance, the gracefulness of movement of the clumsiest walkers; the refinement of sensitive-

ness in the dullest faces; a sensitiveness which has been chiselled down by so many ages of acceptance of life. For these buyers and sellers are the last victors in the struggle of mind against force, and the emergence of being from non-sentient darkness. In this long battle man has been shown no mercy. Every weapon abandoned has meant a risk, every hypothesis a danger; every quickening of impression and response has been bought, and is still bought, by a greater exposure to pain, and all foreknowledge is foreshadowing of death. But how much has been achieved, and against what immensity of negation. Here, as this crowd passes by, I feel a certain reflected pride that I belong to them. I can forgive hardness and deceit, bargaining and competition, because I know the niggardliness of living. I can forgive anger, because stubbornness and resistance have beaten nature. Above all, I can find hope in the friendly talk of the crowd. This friendliness is the noblest sign of victory. I know that it is as yet uncertain and mixed with base metal; that it has not yet conquered slander and cruelty. Nevertheless I have evidence of its

immense power, its easy domination of the world. In its simplest forms it is already stronger than self-love, and defiant of death. I see families looking at the shop-windows, buying a common meal; women denying themselves for their children; men working together for a common end. This mutual aid in work appears as the beginning of a new religion. I stay to see four men unloading a lorry. They use the devices which have given power to human hands; trollies on wheels, handcarts, ropes and slings. Men have shaped boxes, invented nails, gimlets, hammers, saws. I watch these four men at their work. They have a speech; what inflexion of voice, and deft choice of words. Their quarrels are lighter than the wind; their blasphemy is a splendid flourish; their laughter gives a heart and centre to things. Each sets his arms to the burden, with fine control and intricate messages of nerve. One guides another; they put down their load, and straighten their limbs. They take their ease for a moment, and go back to make another journey.

It has been thought by many that, after certain

formulae and acts, and through divine dispensation of mercy, God could be housed on earth in forms of bread and wine. Here, in this progress from shop to curbstone, and from curbstone to shop, is the creation of God, the pride of life.

IV

This morning I drove my car westwards along the Seven Bridges Road towards Eynsham and Witney. I do not know what binding of ideas has orientated my mind towards one point of the compass, and has given me a continual impulse to go westwards. I cannot in any way understand the physical satisfaction in following this impulse, the physical uneasiness at taking a journey eastwards, even though it be to the high Alps. When I was a child I kept this unexplained desire a secret of my own. In later years I have looked for a simple cause, some accident or experience of childhood, some early suggestion. I have thought of an explanation in terms of right- or left-handedness, or a child's fear of the dark. At times I have even wondered, fantastically enough, whether there might not be some subtle nervous reaction to the earth's eastward motion, some tiny strain affecting the whole body. I have explored legends of sunken kingdoms, and the records of geological change,

and land lost under the sea along this western fringe of Europe. I have made this search as one recovering memory after a calamity or illness of the mind, as an exile who has forgotten his own history. If I could break down some barrier, I could explain these tales of bells heard far away in the tide, and a long flat land suddenly opened to the floods. I seem to know these things as birds, wheeling and flying, know—how do they know?—of distant African valleys; but I cannot share their flight. Therefore this western road out of Oxford has always had more significance to me than the books and the colleges. I found within a few days of coming to Oxford as an undergraduate that from Beacon Hill above Swinford Bridge I could see the northern line of the Wiltshire downs where the old roads converged upon Salisbury Plain. I thought of these downs as a military outpost for the Cornish peninsula and all that lay beyond. I have come many a time to the hill or the bridge on summer and autumn evenings. Two or three years ago I found a journal I had written there. I can remember certain dialogues of Plato which I

had read in the woods or on the river bank below the hill.

It is twenty years now since I first saw the bridge; twenty years of the strangest and most violent contrasts; contrasts which few other generations can have known. For a time I could not bring together two streams of thought which flowed deeply in my mind; only in the last few months I have come back, escaping from things hideous and absurd, to the unbroken reflection, the full acceptance of all this beauty. I see it more clearly because I have found the limits of fate, more kindly because, knowing how much is owed to the dead, I remember by these river banks my own debt to the hunting and desires and skill of the early river people. They knew no bridge of arches or workings in hard metal, no carefully kept river banks and weirs. Yet through their desires, their hunting, and their skill, we are here. Twenty years of my life are gone, and I can spare memory for their oblivion, and think of a time long hence when they and I will be nearer even in the continuity of death than we are now in the continuity of living.

Swinford Bridge was made in the year 1777 with all the grace of its time. Three arches lift the road above the river level; three piers are set into the stream, and on other arches the road falls again to the meadows. The towpath runs under the third of the eastern arches; the tollgate is at the western end of the bridge. On either side of the road, a road wide enough for two cars to pass, a high coping follows the saddle-back curve of the masonry. Above the central arches of the bridge the ranges of the enclosing wall are broken by balustrades of pillars nobly cut. Between these pillars one can see the flow of the river. To-day the stream was slow, and the green water dappled with gold by a low winter sun. In flood time this main stream is spread over the meadows, and touches the hinges of a gate on the towpath. The air is full of the noise of this overspread water, a penetrating sound of high and low notes intermingled, persistent as the tide of energy swinging against the piers of the bridge. On the north-east side (downstream) reeds have grown in the silt against the base of the arches, and made a pattern like the papyri on

the Nile banks, or the masts of Egyptian boats, clustered below some village settlement. Three old punts, a green, a yellow, and a red, were moored in a tiny bay at the end of the toll-house garden. Beyond is the new lock-keeper's house, built neatly in the Cotswold style of stone and green-brown roofs, but a little self-conscious, too "rural" for the eighteenth century distinction of the bridge. Below the lock, the river bends, less sinuously than upstream, towards the hanging woods between Wytham and King's weir.

The bridge looks darker after the brightness of the new house; the weathered stone has only patches of sober green or lemon-coloured moss and lichen. The telegraph wires run straight from end to end, and are bound to strong double poles on either side of the river. No one who takes the road from Oxford to Andoversford can forget these great poles, stayed like masts of a ship, following the crest line as the road climbs to the watershed; an anatomical drawing of nerves, an immense *via crucis*. Here and there, at junctions and ganglions of wires, there are intricate geometric designs,

cyphers of white porcelain against the dark brown of the wood, or pitch-black lines against the sunlight; everywhere the wind singing through them a tale "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

West of the bridge stands the tollhouse, on the north side of the road; a square stone house with a warm-coloured roof and three red brick chimneys. I have but to look at these chimneys to remember the twenty years since 1909. Then I had never seen Europe. Now these central red columns remind me of Corot's pictures, and suddenly, of French rivers and bridges, the railway bridge at Melun, and the gate-houses of the Palace of Fontainebleau. When I first came here I knew nothing of France, and I would look beyond the tollhouse to Eynsham village, half a mile away on a hillock above the range of the floods.

Between the bridge and Eynsham, where the railway passes under the road, is another new building; a sugar-beet factory. This factory was put here without self-consciousness, without any thought of the beauty of the river valley, the hill, and the road. By chance it is

slender and light of construction; its shape spoils nothing, and even serves as a balance to the railway and the telegraph wires. The building is made of corrugated iron, grey and rust-coloured by steam and rain, with outworks of machinery painted red, most delicate in the distance, and a little like a far-off view of the web of the Forth Bridge. The pleasant noise of the shunting of trucks in the factory siding; the steady beat of hammering where two curved hangars were being roofed, two aeroplanes flying south-east with a bumble-bee sound as though it were summer in some monstrous and mechanical heaven, all these were signs to me of the change coming over the landscapes of southern England. Once I have travelled sixty miles from London I do not mind this change. The traffic on the roads is another sign of transformation. I would not make too much of the unpleasantness of the new inventions. I suppose that the rattle of explosions, and the acrid smell now hardly separable from speed, are but temporary annoyances; hard enough to endure for those who live by the great roads; but troubles before

which we are not powerless as were our ancestors before the mud and dust, the deep ruts and uncleared filth of their highways. Even now over most of England people can escape more easily, more quickly, and more cheaply from the din of the towns than was ever the case fifty years ago. On the high roads there is turbulence enough, but quiet is very near at hand. Here on this bridge, with every sort of petrol engine halting at the tollgate, starting, changing gear and gathering speed down the slopes, remoteness and silence are only a few steps away. There were none with me this morning to watch the waving of the reeds below these balustrades; a mile away, above the nearer lines of willows, the poplars and elms were tranquil as any secret wood. Nor do I mind the passing traffic. It has brought ugliness, and spread vulgarity—as much the vulgarity of the rich as of the poor—but these are no new appearances, and are less likely to live in the full light of day. A few—even a score of painful years of transition—are worth while if there are more Englishmen about in the English country than ever before

in English history, more townspeople knowing the seasons, the lights and colours of morning and evening. This return to the open air and the sight of beauty is more likely to make Englishmen ashamed and angry at the needless vulgarity of their cities (and above all, the fringes of their cities) than to ruin the countryside. Moreover the separation of town and country had left staleness and monotony for those who worked in the fields. Now this isolation is gone, gone with the old patronage of the labourers. Let those who complain remember that for nearly a thousand years the common man in Europe has had good cause to think that "town air makes free."

The generations move slowly in the villages; change, where it is too slow is most painful, and its meaning less easy to understand. It would be idle to deny that the ultimate gain is bought here as everywhere by a heavy price. While I was looking down at the water a farm-wagon, drawn by two horses, a chestnut and a roan, came over the crown of the bridge. The wagon was strong-wheeled and high-curved, like the wagons in the Luttrell psalter; a heavy cart

made for rough tracks and hard weather. At the back of the load two pitchforks were stuck upright, as though two clumsy giants from a nursery book had been eating a breakfast of turnips. Nosebags for the horses swung below the tailboard. Two farm-hands, a man and a boy, walked by the lead horse of the pair. For a moment the slow, contented walk of men and horses, the glossiness and easy strength resplendent under the sun, took me back thirteen years, to the sight of two Flanders horses pulling a gun out of a ditch.

A cloud came over the sun; the colours were changed suddenly, and I was afraid of a dark mood, and the violence of memory. I watched the cart at the tollgate; in such a wagon the magnates of the Chilternsaetas must have come through the ford to their hall at Eynsham. The boy turned back. Some fifty yards away, near to my car, I saw another cart, two-wheeled, drawn by a black horse. The boy called to the horse, shouting a name three times, but I could not follow his burr'd English.

The horse would not move until the boy came close to him, and again I heard the calling of a name. I turned to watch the lumbering cart, and wondered who had made the boy's green jersey. After the cart had passed me, I looked above the road at the rolling field below Beacon Hill. This field is like a slow-moving wave of earth, full-breasted, heavy of soil, and rich with power of bearing corn. I have found fossils there, turned over by the plough. The whole surface, all this view, and the very course of the river had been made and unmade again by human hands wielding tools and engines. The bridge, the road, the towpath and its gates, the pollarded willows; here was a mastery which the river people would have envied. I might wish for nothing more certain, more secure.

But something remained, elusive, hard to define; something which this rearrangement had not touched. For a time there was no sound except from the railway, the factory, and two men working near by at a hayrick. I noticed a silence of the air, as though a storm were coming over the hill. A moment

earlier, everything had been well known, and understood. What shadow had put me in mind of those sudden intimations, the old belief that all knowledge is recollection? A moment later the mood was gone. The sun was still hidden, but the black horse had drawn his cart past the tollgate, and the three horses were level with the water-meadows again. I put my hands on the warm, damp stone, and wondered what name had been called. I thought of the names of farm horses, recurrent, humble, slow-sounding names. But other names drifted into my mind; names more fiery, belonging to orbits infinitely vast, climbing the southern arch of the winter's night above this and every bridge, above every manger and stable; the names of the two stars Rigel and Aldebaran.

V

I READ Katherine Mansfield's poems in a bookshop in Broad Street. There were the poems of childhood; a fortune-teller might have guessed how long a journey lay in front of her. There were verses written in and about the years 1911 and 1912. To me also these years were luminous with an infinity of time. I, and my contemporaries alone, could remember that after less than fifty months nearly every word of the poetry of our youth had become charged with the pain of life, as tears may fill the eyes of children. There were the poems of later years, when the sand in the hour-glass was running low, and the rhythm of the days and nights was striking too fiercely; when the mechanism of the body was breaking under an intolerable strain. I had noticed last year with the same vividness of perception the change in Katherine Mansfield's letters between 1914 and 1918. I had never known her—never to my knowledge even seen her. Words and sentences shift their meaning quickly enough as

they are passed from hand to hand; yet for each generation there are one or two masters of words whose power lies in the expression of the moods and imagination of their time; I can see my own reflection in this mirror of clear glass.

I came out into the street. Broad Street is shaped like a great galley with prow and stern. The cars aligned diagonally in the car park along the centre line of the street were like a ship's cargo, piled on the decks in harbour until gangs of strange-speaking, dark-faced men should crowd up from the gangway of the Turl to unload this burden. A north-west wind was blowing strongly, with heavy rain-showers. I watched the shadows of the clouds moving across houses and pavements and the smooth surface of the roadway, as from some cape or promontory one may watch the changing colours of the sea to right and left and far ahead. I was filled with bitterness at the everlasting beauty of the white clouds streaming and eddying in their procession. Never would the limbs of men attain this swiftness; never would the bodies of men

endure the labour of comprehending these splendid, unvexed, undreaming transformations of air and light and water. It was mercy enough to be sound of lungs and heart, to have the power of breathing cold air without pain, and to watch the day at noon; yet the eyes may be blinded by the sunlight, and frost which arrays its glistening patterns and exquisite designs of ice and snow weaves drowsiness treacherously about the senses, binds them with deftness in a sleep deeper than the silence of unwaking Arctic seas.

I knew that by very subtlety of interpretation and sensitiveness the body is fretted more quickly; that for those who hear them the sounds of life deafen and pierce the ear-drums; that after a few hours the long waves in their succession tire the arms of the strongest swimmers. Centuries ago the Greeks understood that Destiny, indifferent to the acknowledgment of divine rule, brought suffering to the most pitiful, weakness of body to minds most selfless and reverent before the written and unwritten decrees. The wisest men have found in knowledge a greater desolation, and

in stubbornness of mind a gesture, a pageant, a mist sucked away by the sun in his strength. To us the sun also and his planets hold but a narrow course between the endless coming and going of the constellations and the linked movements of remote stars. We are back again at the doubts of the early philosophers, and talk confusedly about the whole universe of things, whether or no its course be determined, its foundation laid upon ultimate or immanent reason.

How long will men go about their business unharassed by the evidence of calamity? The old barriers against the flood have long been broken; there has been no rebuilding. One whom I would guard from the shadow of destiny once came with me along this Broad Street after we had seen together the acting of *Romeo and Juliet*. We thought it strange that this record—the clearest and simplest, even the happiest, of such records—seemed to the play-goers no more than a scene staged on the boards, a comedy of mistakes, an accident; not the rule of life, the prophetic doom and oracle of the gods. Yet who were the actors?

Do all men in public play a part, and touch only when they are alone the meshes of the net in which they are caught?

I crossed the street. I was still thinking of the dock labourers—or were they raiders and plunderers of ships—who would come up the gangways of Turl Street, spread over the wide decks and carry off this cargo. But these were fancies of the mind, images hurrying across the threshold of consciousness. I could ignore them, and see no more than the evidence of pleasant journeys and comfortable business, prosperity and well-liking. With slow-witted deliberation the keeper of the car park was counting his coins; a young farmer and his wife were packing into their car the parcels bought leisurely in an afternoon's shopping; two children were looking at their new toys, little knowing how much of their pleasure came from the very limitation of their choice. A few days earlier the street had been tarred afresh. After the rain the dust blown into the gutters was wet and glistening like little threads of sand on the seashore; a fine gravel drawn from an old river bed where the debris

of vanished hills had long mixed with the skulls and powdered bones of men and animals.

Again and again I thought how nearly the short cycle of years in which these poems of Katherine Mansfield's had been written coincided after its proper fashion and distinctness with my own experience. The break with an earlier circle, and earlier ideas; a certain liberty of mind, suddenly discovered; the fashioning of relationships which at other times men have thought endless. Even the setting of many of these poems had been familiar to me. Paris, in the years immediately before 1914; for all the economies, the narrowness of our resources, in spite of a crudity and provincialness of mind I could only use of my friends and myself Talleyrand's sentence about life in France before 1789: *Qui n'a pas vécu dans les années voisines de 1789 ne sait pas ce que c'est que le plaisir de vivre.*

As for the evil years after 1914, only those of my own time could know the extreme heightening and intensification of the moments of escape. Cornwall in these years, for all the

savagery of war on the sea, was still a country of the gulf stream and the wild winds. There followed the estrangement of things which had been familiar. Paris in 1917; the oddness of coming back in slavery to the home of one's freedom. I could see from Katherine Mansfield's letters how many of my contemporaries had read the same books about the same time, and with the same intention, finding these books utterly different from the current praise and blame given by the elderly wise. We could not think of our actions in easy terms of truth and falsehood. We could not explain the breakdown of our European life in a few sentences, or make a balance-sheet of praise and blame. We dared not hope for victory more lasting than any other victory of force.

In those days indeed it was better to turn away from hope and fear, or right and wrong, and half away from pity. There was more wisdom in thinking of the lesser cycles of life, more perfect and limited forms. Our own years might be wasted; our gentle and spell-bound relationships might be broken. Yet spring and summer never failed; in the most desolate places there were

butterflies and birds and wild flowers bearing seed as in the long days of the creation. Sometimes I would imagine that after two or three decades of war the apes and baboons could be let out of their cages. We should go back—those of us who were still alive—to the valleys out of which we had climbed many thousand years ago. These creatures would lead us, and old instincts, bubbling up in our crazed brains, would bring us to the tangled woods, heavily scented, coloured too fiercely; here we should be at home, chattering and screeching, nimble and agile again. Nobler minds rose above this accidie. Even for them one might take Clarendon's words about Falkland: "he died as much of the time as of the bullet: for, from the very beginning of the war he contracted so deep a sadness and melancholy, that his life was not pleasant to him; and sure he was too weary of it."

There seem few survivors now. Moreover our misfortunes have been made a common show. Those who were killed in war are thought to have chosen the harder, but the less wise duty. They themselves might have the right to make

this judgment; I deny this right to others. The motives of their choice are misunderstood, confused with political entanglements in which they had no part, or with disillusionment which to them can have no meaning. The representation of their light and darkness has become a thing of money; argument and anger, as though they cared in their graves for rumour, for vanity, for blame. Those who speak in their defence use clumsy words. Some are traitors. Others keep silence; it may be that silence is wisdom.

Yet I could wish for some interpretation which should reach across the night of time. I think that this interpretation would begin with the postulate that, for all the quickening of the action, war is not very different from peace, nor peace from war. In war men go out to meet death together, and are not taken unawares. They die without the presence of women; for women there are hours of pain to be met alone. I do not find in peace that things are much changed. The key to these actions which appear self-willed, and were yet determined, may be found in the revelation of some long

cycle as yet incomplete. Here I notice inferences which I cannot understand. This interpretation for which I look must belong to a distant time; yet for this time all that is distinct and personal will have gone away on the wind, gone with the memory of pain inflicted and endured, and the indignity of corruption.

I am not led astray by sentiment about the healing power of time; the assumption of a perfect world visible under the moon, or the thought of the purifying earth. There is neither good nor evil to be found in the contemplation of this external beauty continually renewed. Moreover in the fecundity of the earth and the sun hideousness can be matched with magnificence. I have seen the earth hot with an unclean life, blossoming in a darkness rejected by the senses. I have watched in market gardens the heaping of mounds of earth on the floors of shadowed and enclosed houses, long mounds like graves newly made for a holocaust of victims. The houses are guarded from the sun; the earth covers the dung of horses, and sets into fermentation the spawn of mush-

rooms and fungi; here and there blades of grass wax fat and green among the legions of tetanus bacilli. These mounds of seething and tumescent fertility swarm with little flies; whole armies of the charnel-house are harnessed for the battle-ground. Two and sixpence a pound at Covent Garden: small enough profit for the grower; American spawn is as good as English; London gives better prices than Manchester. Yet a few yards away these same hands of honest and laborious men tend in their gardens myriads of daffodils:

> "They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude;
> And then my heart with pleasure fills
> And dances with the daffodils."

Threepence a dozen is the wholesale price. . . . Men have ere now begotten children for the slave-market.

Nevertheless the legend of Avalon is persistent: *hic jacet Arturus rex quondam rexque futurus*. The rays of light now starting on their even or fitful path from one of the stars of the firma-

ment may touch a world which has reached its age of gold. I have set my hope in the future, and marked an arch of life which springs above the marshes of this low time; a slighter and more cautious hope than the confidence of those who entombed the bodies of saints and martyrs in the earth of the catacombs, an entertainment for the tourist, a source of livelihood for guides and topographers and hotel-keepers. . . . It is idle to ask whether a breed of automata may not be a fitting crown for these ages of accident and delusion.

For a time I lost sight of these things. On the next day I drove my car across the hills and between the gap made in the chalk downs by the river Thames. I turned south-eastwards to the weald of Sussex, passing great trees and a park where the deer moved like a fleet of sailing ships under a fair wind. I watched the work of the farms, and heard the sharp sound of the axe on fallen trees. Then I came near to the English Channel; the sea-birds flocked inland, and circled over the fields, searching for food after the old wisdom of their kind. I passed Storrington and Arundel, turned

westwards through Chichester with its campanile and Roman street crossing. Before noon on the next day I had climbed Portsdown Hill, and seen the inland waters of three harbours, a symbol for some rude preacher of the triune God of his belief. At Salisbury the tower and steeple were outlined a silver grey against a dark, vast rain-cloud that filled the whole northern sky. I took the shelter of the valley to the ridge of Shaftesbury (where King Canute died), and turned across Blackmore Vale to Sherborne, Crewkerne, and Honiton. The affairs of the towns, the bright colours of women's dresses, the enterprise of merchants, the noisy routine of living fitted well enough into the green downs of England. Between Wilton and Shaftesbury, not far from one of King Alfred's battlefields, there were monuments of the last war of the English; the arms and devices of regiments cut, as the old white horses are cut, into the turf of the hillside.

The scale of England is great enough to contain a synthesis which would include the exquisite transformations, the nice equipoise of the dunghills and the cesspits as well as the apple

orchards, the rounded hills, the singing of the birds. I do not speak of the mightiness of English achievement and victory against adversity and the huge threats of armadas and tyrants. I have in mind only the physical scale of England between the Bristol and English Channels, the Atlantic and the North Sea; the houses and chimneys of the towns; the lonely central uplands, the cliffs of chalk and granite. Here the sea is a silver flash seen from many an inland hill; even in remote valleys the rain brings awareness of the rise and fall of the tide. The interpretation for which I look would not shrink from the filth and dirt, the husks and leavings of life; all shapes of all living things with power of growth and activity of multiplication would find their order and significance. If I were to begin such an interpretation I should know that, for better or worse, I project myself into this physical beauty of England; that after a journey through a new heaven and a new hell I might forget all distinction between good and evil; that I might find in thought an idle by-product, an instrument which once had served a purpose, a set

of symbols doomed with the race to which I belong. After long contemplation I might lose this anger at the death of the young through accidents of war and disease.

Once again I remember that the time is not come for these things. For my own generation there can be no synthesis; nothing to explain the inexhaustible and aimless fecundity of life. *Il faut payer par la tristesse, la désolation, l'orgueil d'avoir pensé.* For us I have only the image of a chariot race; the gallop of horses in the course between birth and death. The deep noise and reverberation of wheels is almost drowned in the shouting and excitement of the crowd massed under canvasses which hide the glare of the sun. A divine emperor sits in his majesty, remote from hate or pity, powerless in his eminence to know the welfare of the world. Living or dead, the charioteers are his subjects; as citizens, as soldiers the crowds in the tiered seats fall under his dominion. If they rise in anger at his caprice, if they kill him, they kill their king. Neither they nor their sons, nor their sons' sons can live without his rule. There is no other law, no different order. Yet these

all have vanished, and the whole empire is gone as surely as at nightfall after the highest festivals the crowd will have left the course, and the races will be ended. A few ruins, a handful of coins, broken statues dug up here and there by some builder's labourer; fragments of records scantily preserved in manuscripts written and recopied with variation of word and line in monkish hands, and suddenly spread broadcast in standard type by machines; the ground plan of cities and crumbling walls of fortification. No more is left of the charioteers and their races, the emperor and his sovereignty.

There is no way of escape. Revolt would be incongruous, absurd; hope is as near, as far as the swallows flying under the bridge on a summer afternoon. Fear is base enough. Quantitative judgments of life, made by the standard of length of days, are as foolish as judgments based upon greatness of estate or extent of possessions. No measurements of contemporary success or failure, of proved achievement or merit are of ultimate validity. The tale is common; the conclusion is without dispute. So

was it these many thousand years ago, when the river people watched the coming of spring, or felt the warm winds blow above the turf buttresses of their encampments. We have entered upon their inheritance, and share their doom; the doom of all precursors of a greater destiny. This destiny is hidden from us for good and all. It is our fate to serve as eunuchs at a queen's marriage bed; to work as the builders of dykes, reclaiming from the sea kingdoms whose consummation and climax are beyond our sight. Yet the days we take, we waste.
What account is made of the days we surrender?

VI

During the university term I sit in this room while my pupils come to read their essays to me. They climb up my stone stairs, just after the hour has struck, walk past the line of portrait engravings in my passage, and knock at my door. I know what chairs they will choose. They will open their books, and read. I shall break into their reading with a question or a correction. Then we shall talk about the subject-matter of the essay; the authorities which they or I have been reading; disputed points of theory or interpretation.

So in the mountain village I, a stranger, have seen other strangers bring their letters to the post office. They buy their stamps, and, in sentences carefully framed, ask the time of the mails, or the price of seats in the black and yellow autobus. They are gone; the postmaster sets the village mark on their letters; one more postbag is sent down the valley to the railway.

My business is to teach history. I seem to have drifted into this teaching of history. Sometimes I wish I were skilled enough to teach philosophy. I should like to have seen the gossamer of the philosopers blowing in the wind; for it is now a wind of morning, and it is good to watch the climbing of the sun in heaven.

What do I teach? What do my pupils learn? They have a plan of work, moulded on the ideas of yesterday, paying some tribute to erudition as to a distant sovereign, but under the direct satrapy of examinations. The examination system was brought to its perfection here in the eighteen nineties; the largest and most costly of the modern buildings of the university was built as the satrap's palace. The new sciences were not served with such boldness of conception; the university library made no claim; nor was there any care to keep the beauty of the Oxford streets and their surrounding hills. In this concentration upon a lesser end there was a sense of duty to the state, a vague utilitarianism. Here was an instrument of selection which could be used for the greatest good of the greatest number. In the

proconsular towns of England, Cheltenham, Bedford, Tunbridge Wells, or in the week-day procession of civil servants between Whitehall and the Duke of York's steps, one sees the examined of the past, and the examination system projected into the future. There is no reason to deny the value of the system, or to withhold a certain pride in its results. With all its clumsiness and its jargon of "discuss" and "criticise," its superficiality and amassing of "points," there is no readier test of sense and resolution and suppleness of mind. Its anxieties are soon forgotten; its mistakes are more quickly corrected than many of the misjudgments of the world. As for its dullness and its repetition, this is the affair not of the examined but of the examiners. In teaching my pupils, and in my own work, I can soon have done with the exactions of this immediate master. The service owed to erudition touches me more nearly. Here I have to meet claims of divine right and ultimate obedience. I do not know how far I am a loyal subject. I use this term because the study of history, though it has excited and absorbed my full attention,

has always seemed to me to have about it something of the paradox of the Byzantine empire. This empire had treasures upon treasures of gold. Dreams come from remembering its stiff hangings and rustling jewel-bordered silks; the high titles and august precedence of its officers; the images of the saints formal and distinct in their perfection. For centuries this power sustained the tradition of the civilised world, and kept the gate of Christendom. Its achievement of empire was no barbarian mirage or opiate of sleep. Its capital was guarded by soldiers of many races; for long years no destruction came to it. Its frontier fortresses were squarely built; its watch-towers looked out towards the horizons of danger. Within its provinces the cornfields were multiplied, the granaries were full. Cities were linked together by the most fearless of roads. Caravans and fleets set out to trade with the north and east and south. For protection and safety, for all the ornaments of living, for skill in ivory and metal and stone, this dominion has deserved well of human memory.

But from beginning to end how different it was from its own pretensions and its citizens' belief. To itself it seemed the heart and conclusion of the world. Yet we know it as a bulwark, and not a centre, as a state of transition which could not endure. Its progress is to us a name for immobility, and in the pride of its purple-born we see but impotence. Its faith was superstition, its philosophy a continual degradation of dogma; its thousand years were a long epilogue.

The study of history has this very sharpness of contrast. Here is another well-ordered kingdom, impressive in its form, magisterial in its authority. History claims to be a record of the past; it has even set out to guide the present. It has its careful distinctions; its elaboration of critical apparatus; a vividness of narration, an irony of its own. It will explain why institutions and bodies politic have taken such a form; why this man met such a fate, why this people left their homes. It is full of the rise and fall of nations. It has a bunch of master keys with which to open the secrets of all changes. Now it is the destiny of one chosen people,

now the extension of one belief, the effect of climate and the seasons; in our own time an economic interpretation; food before art, shelter before God: the forms of bodies politic deduced from modes of sustenance. History assumes a perspective of its own, a displacement in space and time; like life itself, it asks for impartiality and sympathy, moral judgment and cold exposition of motive. It aims at universality, and deals with particulars.

But what is it for each man? Is it not something fluctuating, something built up from within, a name which can never be spoken, a song in an unknown language? Does it not begin with each man's life? Does not every man see himself in this supposed multitude? Every man is victor and vanquished, ruler and subject, villein and lord. The famine of which he reads is his own hunger, the pestilence his own sickness; glory and accomplishment are his own ambitions; laws and institutions are his own regulated life. He knows change because he changes, permanence because he endures; fear because he is afraid; tumult and rebellion because he cannot master himself.

Therefore when the writers of history take the scale of others, they do but give an exact measure of themselves. Of what value is the externality, the evidence upon which a conclusion is built? The facts are made for each man, and by each man are taken from the infinite variety of human experience. The more certain the evidence, the more has been excluded; the more convincing the generalisations, the greater is the creative power.

Then history is an art; a play, or rather a never-ending tragic cycle, a public confession of the historian, made after long self-examination, and projected into narrative form. The historian is never passive; he shapes his history out of the riches or poverty of his own mind. Therefore there need be no perplexity about the contingency of things; the difficulty of knowing where to begin in any period, or in the study of any man.

In the year A.D. 524 Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, who had led his people into Italy, and set up a rule in Ravenna, put to death the philosopher Boethius. Theodoric acted through fear of conspiracy, and out of

jealousy at an excellence to which he could never attain. Boethius had planned a Latin translation and exposition of the books of Plato and Aristotle. His death took him before he had translated much more than the elements of Aristotle's logic. Until the twelfth century Boethius' work was almost all that the western world possessed of the master treatises of Greek philosophy. The rediscovery, through Moslem and Greek sources, of the rest of Aristotle's works, changed and enriched the current of Christian thought. But if Theodoric had been wiser, and Boethius had lived for ten more years, who can say what men might not have known and done in the earlier mediaeval centuries? Does all our modern history swing in this balance of fear and mercy, and live in the uncertain moods of an illiterate king?

We escape from such an absurdity if we think of history as an art among other arts; an impression of things continually receding; a picture which has meaning though it cannot find the way back to the origin of light. Historical truth is born of skill in selection; of a flexibility of touch, a sense of colour and

rhythm; a qualitative richness of emotional experience. Historical technique will be most ready to serve those masters who are marked out to rule.

My business is to teach history. But how can I teach an art? What do my pupils learn? Teaching is one of the dangerous trades. Repetition may bring deadness; authority may be used too easily; initiative and independence may seem no more than a pupil's caprice and self-will. Familiarity with the routine of my work may bring another danger. I may treat my pupils as historical material. In a sense I am bound to make this experiment. For the moment I must become the person I am teaching, see the subject-matter of my work as he sees it, know as little as he knows. With each pupil I must practise a new part. In the nine years during which I have taught I have come to reverse the perspective in which my pupils view themselves. They know that they are growing older; but to me they grow younger, as each year separates me by its twelve months from them, and the thoughts of their time.

I find that this difference in age changes the position of the burden, and sets new problems before the old are solved. My work is easier in that I have more knowledge of the world, and have read more books written by wise men; harder because I do not know the language of a later generation. I cannot tell what my pupils learn. Some of them, often the most erudite, appear to learn nothing. Yet I cannot see what is stirring in their minds, deepening the channels of happiness or pain, forging a shield or a sword against the world. I know so little of my pupils; practically nothing of their childhood, their homes, their heredity, the talk of their society. I may set the same essay subject to two men; make them read, as the more docile will read, the same books, attend the same lectures. They will work the same number of hours, and write essays of the same length. Their essays will be entirely different; even the common counters of the game, the dates, the names, the facts of the text-books will be arranged in different patterns. Sometimes the interpretation is absurd (let the clear-headed philosophers define this term), and laughter

the only means of instruction. A young girl writing on Napoleon; a man with an accountant's future describing a kingdom lost for a wild desire. I may quote to the one Guizot's judgment that he never understood the greatness of Napoleon until he had himself governed men; to the other, Cleopatra's words . . . "There is nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon." Sometimes these things are set down with quaint mnemonics in note-books. Who knows through what devious ways the words may not wander, suddenly to return, and alter the destiny of the unborn?

I have wondered whether ancient or mediaeval or modern history is the most profitable study for my pupils. In ancient history there is more frequent contact with the greatest of historians; a reading and a close scrutiny of their imperishable work; a wisdom expounded in grave nobility of language. Mediaeval history, nearer in time, is further from the threshold of thought. Its excitement and its primitive violence are less mediatised by self-conscious reflection. In its elusiveness there is something of the hidden life of children or animals. This is the secret of

its power of awakening some quiet landscape in the mind to a sense of danger; its sudden inruption, as in the romantic revival, into valleys which had long been cultivated without fear of its frozen beauty. Mediaeval records are full of those contrasts which are the essence of living; the joy of battle and the peace of resignation; immense security of final belief, powerlessness and hesitation before a doubt of the moment; a fear of judgment and a confidence in mercy:

Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuae viae:
Ne me perdas illa die.

Did not the crusaders, between hours of plunder and massacre with the bare sword, stumble through streams of blood *gaudentes et prae nimio gaudio plorantes ad nostri Salvatoris Jesu Sepulchrum adorandum*?

Ancient and modern history has none of these avalanches of the mediaeval spring. Modern history is mature, intellectual, like modern music. But it has one emotional quality peculiar to itself. It can stir the mind to present action, because it casts its shadow into the

future. Not one of its great movements has come to an end; the renaissance, the reformation, the revolution—three symbols of affranchisement—are still signs in heaven leading or deluding men to look for an undiscovered wisdom, and a new order of society. Here the imagination can take its highest flight, a flight towards a brightness too strong for our eyes. Hope for the future alone gives meaning to the continuity of life and to our way of lamentation. Here is the Paradise of our historical trilogy; a luminousness beyond the language made for our change and our becoming.

Again I have wondered whether I ought not to direct my pupils more insistently to what is called "great literature." I do not suppose that in their reading of text-books or original authorities in modern history these undergraduates find more than two or three books which are works of art. I grudge all this time wasted upon the journeymen. Yet I am afraid of the study of "great literature" for examination purposes. Literary criticism should be the business of craftsmen; criticism at second-hand

is but argument about ceremonial. It is easier to discuss action; for every man has to act and to act quickly. The penumbra of action can be described within the limits of an examination answer, while the radiance of great prose or poetry colours the whole mind, and cannot be brought to quantitative analysis. It is too near the heart. I hate any talk of it, except the talk between friends.

The study of words is another matter; here I am angry at my own ignorance and idleness. For words are open to life as the sea is bare to heaven: bare as the most troubled Patagonian seas. Words are never still; by day and night the wind blows them; they are sails, sentences are ships, books are great navies driving heavily round the ultimate capes. No convoy passes to a new generation in another harbour without some tearing of canvas, some straining of metal or timber. The study of words comes near to the very processes of history; a dictionary is the average of a thousand thousand biographies; a key to self-knowledge unlocking the determinism of one's thought.

For nine years I have done much of my work and taught all my pupils in an old building. What conditions are imposed upon me by these surroundings? I do not think there would be much novelty if I were to teach in a new university in a northern town. A new building has an excitement of its own; every hour is a change; the unworn stairs, the half-empty bookcases in the library are the beginnings of a new life. Yet every architectural form reaches back into the past, as every column is older in idea than every arch. Wherever I might find myself, there would be no escape from the symbols of "the past leaning out into the present." In another place other lines of association would run their course. Where there are steamers and railways, the symbols of sound might be more direct than those of sight; sounds of an unceasing coming and going. Where labourers and clerks are hurrying to their work, and there are factories, warehouses, strong-rooms, ledgers, a university alone seems to have finality; here men stay for a time, leave the life of bees and ants, listen, read, and close their books. But in Oxford I find a different

scale of measurement. Outside my windows time moves forward in a flow unbroken by eddies, or buoys, or the piers of bridges; I can measure its constancy by the ageing of the stones. I can see my pupils outlined sharply against this movement. Beyond their note-books, beyond my talk—a thin reed pipe in this noise of waters—I can look out on the eastern semicircle of the Radcliffe camera. It begins as a shadow in an architect's mind, hardly distinct from his other thoughts and images, the outcome of his earlier work, of the pictures and buildings he has seen; it is focussed more clearly, with exact calculation of material and forecast of stresses and strains; drawn in fine outline, given depth and content, and transformed into another key as its dome is made by the artifice of many hands. Then it becomes a drawing again, altered by no trained workman, but by the indifference of heaven at every hour, under every light.

VII

On one of the last days in December I drove to London from the south-west of England through mist and rain that made winter seem the final catastrophe of the world; a withdrawal of life which had about it more than the indifference of nature; a sign that Heaven was weary of man and the actions of men. Here and there the shrivelled beech leaves of last summer made a hedge or curtain of burnished colour. Above these couchant fires a dead grey fog covered the hills; water lay along the furrows and meadow levels in the lowlands. The roads over which I drove were themselves evidence of broken customs, forgotten kingdoms, fallen beliefs. They had been made for one purpose; they were used for other journeys. They crossed and recrossed each other; they were diverted, or widened; old tracks were left untrodden in the fields. I passed green roads leading to Stonehenge; I drove between the ramparts and standing stones of Avebury. For more than thirty miles

I took the Fosse Way. Along this Roman road, between Ilchester and Shepton Mallet, there is a sudden break in the straight course. Some parish need, some landowner's pride of possession had turned the Roman line. The last of the Roman religions had outlived the road; yet here too the course of history was interrupted. The churches were Gothic. The Christian beliefs which had transformed the Roman empire were themselves changed when the empire fell. Even the Gothic buildings had lost their meaning; the pyxes and reliquaries, the roods and the images were gone. Sometimes the modern road kept to the mediaeval ways along the hillsides, as though the marshy ground had never been drained, and man was bound to yield to the caprice of the river gods. The middle west of England has few of the new motor roads which run like suspension bridges from city to city. In our great-grandfathers' time railway cuttings were as bare, as urban as these motor roads; now in spring and summer the trains move between tapestries of wild flowers. For a few years, while they are scarred and quarried as the engineers left them,

and as yet unsoftened by sun and rain, these new roads cannot lead us away from ourselves and the knowledge of our fate. Here and there they make a friendly causeway against the tides of the sea; after a time we cannot escape the fear that, like men lost in the dark, we are travelling on some wide treacherous circle. On more than one road we might have come upon an intention and power not our own; a path made for armies from another continent; a preparation for our despoilment and ruin, or a way of return from exile.

The old turnpike roads, where they have not been widened or replanned, are familiar with the memory of a recent time. The greatest road in Wiltshire takes the traffic from London to Bath across the uplands between Marlborough and Devizes; the carriages of eighteenth century statesmen made their course along it; grossness and elegance met at its coaching inns. One or two antiquaries thought of the stones and barrows, the buried ornaments and weapons; most men had little interest in this treeless waste. Few artists painted these downs before the nineteenth century. No one

has ever painted them as I saw them, green and grey like the surface of the English Channel fifty miles to the south.

I left the Bath road at Beckhampton, and turned north-eastwards to Swindon; a monstrous ill-planned settlement; a railway works suddenly approached from these burying-places and paths of an older migration. The road from Swindon to Oxford crosses the vale of the White Horse and mounts the ridge between Faringdon and the Cumnor hills. Cumnor Hurst is its eastern landmark; Faringdon clump—where Cromwell put his guns—a richer and no less dominant boundary to the west. Along this ridge, in the last hour of the afternoon, I overtook horsemen jogging home from the hounds, as though the sports of the past were turning away into some side-track of memory, dying not in battle, but overcome by some change for the better, and abandoned because there was more interest in other things.

From Oxford I took the train to London. After a day in the bare spaces of the middle south-west, London had almost the intellectual

excitement of Paris. Its very existence is a triumph. At first it seemed impossible that so many men could live in one city, that so many houses could be lit, so many roads paved. Then I noticed the lavishness of colour and light. After the fog and rain and death of winter men seemed here to have devised some form of immortality. Yet I had a fear that this immortality was less to be desired than sleep in unbroken silence. These lights were disturbed and anxious; in the country the trees were still; the dead beech leaves rustled a little, and were quiet; even the beat of my car had about it a rhythm which men can give to unliving things, but never to themselves. I thought of hibernating animals, deep in slumber of a wider span than days or nights. The restlessness of sky signs and confusion of traffic were evidence that all the enterprise of men must end in failure. This city could not rest; its people were as mountaineers who have set themselves to climb a peak, and must pass one way before the melting of the frozen surfaces. I saw them from a distance; yet I knew that their going was too slow, and that they would

never reach the height. What meaning was there in all this diversion and noise? Much of it was primitive enough; a search after food, or mating; acquisition; property. Some of the streets had markets enough for pity. The wastefulness of life through untold ages, the maladjustment of living men to their surroundings for a few score thousand years had brought into being an undergrowth of foiled instinct and turbulence of sexual desire. Here was a breakdown of self-mastery, commonplace enough, but no less devastating; a denial of personality by the very act which seems a consummation of power; defeat, with all the emblems of victory; surrender, under the name and mask of possession.

The running of sand through the hour-glass, the nothingness of these moments, was set against a background of magnificence and achievement, as heaven and hell were bound together in Dante's poem. Here, close at hand, within a stone's throw of the street signs, the froth and bubbling of the cauldron, were some

of the greatest pictures of the world. The National Gallery was as dark as the mounds and heaths and barrows which I had passed ten hours ago; but a night watchman with an electric torch might go from room to room, and turn a sudden light upon the work of Michael Angelo, or see the spring in Italy these five centuries away. A deeper rhythm of creation flooded through the mind, drowning all lesser things before the immediate field of vision. Picture after picture took form in my memory, brought out of the shadows by the circle of these watchmen's lights. I saw Michael Angelo's *Descent from the Cross*. I remembered the youth of the figures; the splendour of their grief; a failure more to be envied than the success of Caiaphas and Herod and Pilate. I saw the Italian battle with the long spear shafts, white and red; spears couched or broken, or threatening a swift death.

I thought of battle. Here, shrouded at the summit, and black as the outline of the Gallery, was the column set up after the victory of Trafalgar. Nelson and this battle still excite one's mind, as battles must excite the descen-

dants of nameless victors in the struggle against the deadness of the universe or the treachery of life. I had read often of Trafalgar as a climax after months of beating against the elements in the blockade of the French ports. I knew the disposition of the fleets; I had felt the grime of powder, the labour and sweat of pulling back the guns, of loading and reloading them in the choking air. I knew that this victory had given Englishmen security, and broken the completeness of Napoleon's plans. Yet I cannot see this or any other column or arch of triumph without anger at the irrelevance and exaggeration of war in Europe. I had learned to look away from Nelson and his captains (not levelling their courage or reducing the noble scale of their action) to a world of impersonal causes. I had watched the ripening of the ideas of the French revolution, followed the application of power and machinery to industry. With a little more wisdom, with less false pride, these wars need not have been fought; the peasants and labourers, the sailors and fishermen might have been left to a daily work which was hard and ungracious

enough in itself to please the gods in heaven. For all the terror of our time, the play still goes on. Sentry boxes are still set in Whitehall; costumed soldiers still uphold the old belief that the government of Englishmen is authority of rulers over subjects.

As I walked towards the Temple, past the incongruous archipelago of buildings east of Wellington Street, the place became quiet. Within the Temple there was silence. No lights burned in the round church of the Templars. The knights once kept the roads to Jerusalem. Their order is gone six hundred years and more; it could hardly survive the end of the crusading age; it was destroyed by its own ambitions, its own wealth, and the greed of the secular powers. There was little about property when the order was founded; its contract was made with death. The statutes of the order were elaborate enough; but when its members talked of parchments, they could think that in the last day the earth would burn like a scroll. Their English lands fell to the crown; Edward II granted them to the Knights Hospitallers, who in their turn leased

the Temple to certain men learned in the law. Thus the lawyers came into the soldiers' possessions, and for many years the round church was a meeting-place for pleaders and clients. Here might be found the progress of society; a development of rule to meet violence and fraud and chicane; an assumption of orderliness, a sense of security: security for what end?

I knocked at the Middle Temple gate from the pavement of a Roman road. Twelve hours only separated me from the Fosse Way; a fraction in the tale of the hours between the end of the Roman occupation and this December night. The Middle Ages, the Tudors and Stuarts and Hanoverian England divided Roman London from the new cinemas and electric lights; yet the time cycle of English history was short, and there had been little change in the form of the rocks or the secular advance and recession of the glaciers.

Nor was there lacking to my day's journey a unity in space as in time. As I reached my staircase, I heard sharply diffused through the air the sound of a steam syren; a tug was drawing a train of barges towards Westminster.

A strong tide, one of the high tides of the year, was flowing under the bridges where seagulls wheel and swoop down and dive for food. Below the street lamps with their dolphin ornaments the water was rising to cover the space between high and low water marks; already the same pervading lunar power had lifted the Atlantic currents where the waves first break against the Longships light. By sea or by land I could have gone back to these western limits; by sea, following the capes and widening waters of the English Channel: by land, across the central hills of southern England, past Avebury or Stonehenge.

VIII

I WAS staying in London for the first time as a stranger. Twenty years ago I was at school in Charterhouse Square. My friends and I thought of ourselves as belonging to London; yet we were strangers enough, and our school a curious island in these London streets. We never reckoned how few came to the city without any thought of earning and spending, to learn Latin and Greek, and to read ancient history. We were taught nothing of the Middle Ages, or we might have seen ourselves as clerks, intended from childhood for a profession which would cut us off from the world of laymen. To us the streets of central London led to a sixth-form room where we wrote Latin prose, and construed our texts. On Monday afternoons we read Homer; on Thursday mornings we said our repetition. Every Thursday morning of one summer term I would walk from London Bridge station, up King William Street, past the Bank, and through the little alleys off Cheapside, saying

to myself lines of the *Agamemnon*. I do not think that any of us took account of the immensity of our privilege. At least one half of our contemporaries left school before they were seventeen; we never realised the difference in our own fortunes. Even the incongruity between our work and our surroundings never amazed us. I hated the sight and smell of Smithfield Market; but there was no oddness in reading Gray's *Elegy* or Shelley's *Adonais* in a room overlooking Goswell Road. I discovered for myself the gold and fire and sadness of Virgil in a crowded tram on Brixton Hill; henceforward the *Aeneid* ceased to be a task; yet I had no sense that I too had escaped from a beleaguered town. I assumed, if ever I thought about it, that everyone knew the story of Dido and the persecutions of Heaven; Troy and its fall, and the wanderings of homeless men.

There was some irony in our unconscious isolation. In my last year at school, from reading a guide-book, from a dream, or picture of old London, I came to believe that somewhere between Aldersgate and Moorgate on

the north, between Blackfriars and the Mansion House on the south, there was a garden, opening suddenly from a side street, bright with a fountain and summer flowers. Day after day a friend and I looked for this garden ; we explored every by-way north and south of Cheapside; we described the garden to several warehousemen, and a policeman! I thought that may be the Lord Mayor, or the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's, or the Governor of the Bank of England had large gardens of their own. I found to-day that I still hoped to see an open gate near Friday St. or Bread St., or the alleys south of Barbican.

At Oxford I lost little of this isolation. When I found that most people seemed to care more for a hundred tiresome interests than for the masters of beauty, I thought that I had only failed to get their confidence. Why indeed should others tell me their secrets? How could I guess the reason for their assumed indifference? For years I was foolish enough to imagine, in spite of all I saw and heard, that the life of England was directed, as my school life had been directed by wise teachers, to the delight

of beauty and the accumulation of knowledge. Time has given me the power to laugh at my own simplicity; yet I lived so long in ignorance of the language of the age that I am cut off from much of the experience of the modern world.

A few weeks ago I heard a young man say that he was more interested in Mr. James Joyce's account of the city of Dublin than in any *City of God*. I had read Mr. Joyce's work less carefully than I had read St. Augustine, but I knew a good deal about Dublin (and Paris), and the citizens of these towns, and I had spent much time in enquiring about the fate of the Roman empire and those calamities which had troubled St. Augustine's thought. Moreover I had found the books of these two men alike in many things; theological works of the mediaeval type, confusedly written, with experiments of style, oddly provincial for all their insight and dexterity. Weakness of personality and speculative power, preoccupation with a single theory of life, ultimate disgust and fear of experience seemed to limit the effectiveness of the writers. Their scale of values seemed to

me wrong. Each gave a tiresome prominence to functions of the body, the significance of which is wont to be exaggerated or glossed over according to the fashion of the time. To me St. Augustine appeared more worth reading, because he expounded with greater mastery of language a thesis of wider interest. The setting of the *De Civitate Dei* was the fall of the Roman world; surely a setting of more significance than anything that had happened in Dublin for the last two thousand years.

Yet how can I judge the effect of this or that book upon its readers? Where some find a revelation of life, others see no more than cleverness and copy-book work of little coteries; a stage with scenery, and no actors; at best the perfection of miniature-painting, and a certain delicacy of mood. I had noticed this delicacy of mood in the prose and verse of my own time. But I had begun to wonder whether the western world was not entering once again upon a period of sterility; whether the modern burden of enquiry into the conditions and constitution of the material environment was not as deadening to the creative arts as the burden

of defence in the troubled centuries of the barbarian migrations. It might be that now, as then, a new language, a whole group of languages, had to take shape before words could again serve men as they had served Virgil and Tacitus. Perhaps the confusion and experiments of the day were the precursors of this new speech and method of writing. I would not judge unkindly the acrostics, the crude alliterative effects of monkish stylists in the early Middle Ages.

On the other hand I knew that I had always been slow to see magnificence and power; I remembered that there was scarcely a classic which I had not failed to understand on first or second reading. I thought that perhaps I had read too much about the past; that I had lived too long among old buildings in a place of serene beauty; that I was becoming too much like the Romans of the fourth and fifth century, content with the achievements of an earlier age. I determined to go to London, not as I went in term-time, on business, but to study at leisure the people whom I met, to walk about the streets and put my tastes and judg-

ments to something more than an academic test.

At first I could hardly get beyond the spectacle of the tidal river, and the oddness of my own schooldays. I looked at the men of my age at work in offices and warehouses. I could not guess what fate had affranchised me from this routine, and allowed me to look at will into the past, to read and write, to go whenever I wished into wide sunlit places. After I had become familiar with my own detachment I found myself noticing the life of the city as though I had never seen it before. I watched the women and men of the middle class, the suburban class to which I belong. I saw them enter and leave the city by the southern bridges or the northern and eastern railways. When they were gone, in the small hours of a Sunday morning, the city became a town in some distant province where only church bells broke the silence, and struck the hours between death and resurrection. When they were flooding the streets and offices, I saw these men and women as a river people still; working as the earlier men had worked—when this

London had a name now long forgotten—on the ground sloping up from the marshes; working unconsciously for some common end which must belong to a distant future; a continual and willing sacrifice offered without bitterness, almost without murmur against heaven. All day I watched them; every hour of the day I wished that a memorial could be written for them, to be read far hence by those who will reap the harvest. I thought it shame that this unselfish obedience and unending resignation should be forgotten. Was there not one man whose hand would not fail through these years of preparation; a Virgil to write this new *Aeneid*; a witness who should take oath that he had seen these men, and had known the courage with which they endured ugliness, confusion, habit, indignities of the body and poverty of mind; that youth left them too early, and old age came too soon; that they were mocked daily by the rising and setting of the sun, by simpler and easier forms of life, by a thousand signs of failure, by their own weakness, inconstancy, and death?

I followed them to their pleasures. One night

I went to eat my dinner at one of their sham palaces of thin marble. I brought with me a road book of England because I was afraid; afraid of the symbols of destiny, the evidence of defeat. I kept my book unopened. The tables were so close together that I belonged to every party round me. Nearest to me were two women from a northern county. They had come to London for the sales, and talked of this and that draper, of prices in London and the north. Striped tigers in the Indian jungles, quick furry creatures among the snow, of this kind are your masters! The pine woods are torn down from the mountains and crushed into paper for drapers' catalogues; long is the time since Venus came naked on the foam of the sea to the Paphian shore.

The dull prose of these women, spoken between knife and fork in the accent of the border ballads, mixed with another talk. In front of me a small family was dining before the theatre; father, mother, elder daughter and the man to whom she was engaged; a younger son and a daughter still a child. They drank champagne. The father was a business man of some success,

heavy and generous, none too certain of the future, none too content with his elder daughter's choice. He cared most for his youngest child; the long-forgotten delicacy of his own boyhood, and a lost sharpness of perception came back to him when he spoke to her. He studied her enjoyment, said nothing to trouble or break the excitement and unspoken fulness of her pleasure, watched that the others showed equal respect. The elder daughter was a little uneasy at the young man's presence, anxious to please, content with her dress—though she did but follow the pattern given her by the multiple shops—looking forward to the theatre when there would be less strain and a situation in which she was an onlooker again, free to watch others act a part, and to follow the play to its end. I thought that she had something of her father's uneasiness about a future time. Her brother was less talkative, uninterested in the dinner, unimpressed by the ice buckets and the champagne. He sat between his father and mother; but his mother said little to him. Her talk was mainly with the elder daughter and young man. She was

happy enough, and must have known happiness in her own house. There was no sign of disillusionment, no sudden memory of a dinner about the year 1905 when she had first known her husband. Nor had she cause to doubt her daughter's choice. The young man was good enough, and not too good. He had no dangerous lines in his face; he would be loyal, thoughtful without imagination, hard-working, and sure of moderate rewards. He would not ask too much from his wife or from the world. He was still a stranger to the family into which he was marrying; their resemblances puzzled him, and brought him as near as ever he would come to doubts about the nature of personality or the freedom of the will. But he would soon forget these things, nor would he remember them again until they were coloured with delight in his own children.

A few minutes before eight, mother and elder daughter led the way to the theatre. Beyond their table I could see three over-dressed women, their youth past without trace either of hardship and struggle or of fine experience in their eyes; a European type, common to

every social class; a type without significance for heaven or hell. I turned to a table at right angles with my own. Here a shopwalker, or departmental manager, seemed to be entertaining his staff. The host sat at the head of the table, with five guests on either side. Nine of the ten were young men, the two youngest little more than schoolboys, and elaborately deferential to their elders. On the right, in the place of honour, was the oldest of the party; an odd, untrustworthy man, more at his ease than the host, though of a lower social class. The dinner was not a great success. Most of the younger guests were silent. The older man talked a good deal, and whenever he spoke all except the two youngest listened carefully, and with an amused tolerance. His talk was flippant, and good-humoured; yet behind it there was a continual attack upon the host; an attack subtly and cautiously made, quiet and destructive and cynical, never once missing the mark. I was sure that the jokes would be repeated with laughter and malice after the dinner was over, and the young men on their way home. I could guess the reason. The host was a querulous,

thin-lipped man, burdened with his little authority, slight and undistinguished in body and mind. I thought him mean. He might have spent a few shillings more on the dinner, having spent so much; he might have suggested other drinks than cider and ginger ale; he might have handed round his cigarettes a second time with more flourish; he might well have offered his guests the narrow cheroots which he smoked himself. He might have taken more care about the planning of the table, and have avoided the mistake of putting the two youngest guests in places where they had little chance to join in the talk. When I left them they were drinking their coffee. The older man was still playing on the uneasiness of the host. One of the youths half-way down the table was taking a cigarette from a dented gunmetal cigarette case; another was drawing a picture on the back of the menu card.

I had no right to blame this niggardliness; I had more money, and yet I was dining alone. None the less I wanted to declaim a page of food and drink from Rabelais. I wished that I could have made this man understand the

grace of style which is independent of wealth and knowledge of the world; the pleasure and courtesy of entertaining guests; the violence of Rubens' pictures, the roll of wind and thunder of waves in stormy weather; the richness of summer pastures—all the extravagance of life which would have broken the reserve of his guests, and turned the sharpness of their malice. The dining-hall had not lessened my uneasiness. There was no distinction about it; its decoration was a copy of rich men's hotels, and these hotels were copies of French palaces. Nearly a century and a half ago the French *bourgeoisie* made an end of the world in which such decoration once had a meaning. For many generations the middle class in England had cherished a handful of ideas remote from this marble and gilt, these imitations of the rooms made for the Pompadour and the Dubarry. Heavy rococo lines crossed and recrossed the hall; the walls bulged with confused patterns of staring marble; the candelabra were thick with gilt paint. Nothing in the room bore relation to the diners; I was angry that they should be fobbed off with the leavings of another culture,

and should but copy the luxury of those whom they had conquered.

I thought of the economy of Alpine flowers, living near to the margin of subsistence. I remembered with delight the care of these flowers to keep close to the ground, and harbour for themselves the warmth of the earth, or gain the covering of a slight snowfall in times of frost before the deep winter snows. I saw the bright colours, the wide petals set to attract the insect life rare in these high places; the tender covering of down which protected the plants against rain and the coldness of the nights. I found a significance in the extension of the life-cycle of the Alpine flowers beyond a single year, because they may not reach their fulfilment in one short summer of the mountains. Here out of sparseness and hard conditions is born a victory which the common man can well understand; a strength and adaptation and persistence of life, a beauty of design, a suppleness of youth, a deliberate attack upon the nothingness and emptiness of death.

I left the veneer, the profusion, the sickly music of this dining-hall. I walked to the

Embankment, and turned upstream, as the tide was filling the river. Here in Westminster, some thirty years after my College of All Souls was built, Caxton had set up his printing press, and learned to use inventions which would multiply the works of his hands, and save the weary labour of copying. . . . "And for as moche as in the wrytyng of the same" (*The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*) "my penne is worn, myn hande wery and not stedfast, myn eyen dimed with ouermoche lokyng on the whit paper, and my corage not so prone and redy to laboure as hit hath ben, and that age crepeth on me dayly and febleth all the bodye. . . . Therefore I haue practysed and lerned at my grete charge and dispense to ordeyne this said book in prynte after the maner and forme as ye may here see, and is not wreton with penne and ynke as other bokes ben. . . ." To these inventions I could find no end. I thought that most of them (in spite of the exploitation done by covetous, sharp-witted men) added to the richness of the world. I watched the trams, ugly in shape and colour by day, swanlike in movement through the night. They drew up

under the railway at Charing Cross, then turned southwards to the outer suburbs. Gravely they passed over Westminster Bridge, a changing background of light and darkness above the black water, noble as any procession to a king's marriage.

I had made the mistake of looking for the meaning of this ordinary life of the men of my estate in the centre of London. I had counted it as something complete, as an end in itself, and not as a preparation. In the city I had seen surrender to the process of history; a sadness and a doom without limit, so far back ran the past, so remote was the future. This city was ringed about with poverty; eastwards and north-eastwards and northwards, and along the southern river bank, a prison-house into which women and men were born; for our shame and our disgrace. I could not but think of the old song: "John the miller, that ground small, small, small. . . . The king's son of heaven shall pay for all." Yet over against a morass of degradation I had to set, in the outer suburban streets, an achievement known to no other city or country, no earlier kingdom or

republic, no rule or dominion. Never were so many children born straight-limbed, sound of lungs and heart; never was such care given to them. Here was a release from the birthright of damp, undrained farms; closed windows, low ceilings; manure heaps, and flies, and rotting offal; the plague-ridden, sunless houses of mediaeval cities, the hovels of the mediaeval countryside, the cholera-breeding, stagnant gutters of a century ago. Here on a large scale, without a background of slavery (and every year the range of economic serfdom growing narrower), without the temptations of corruption, the dream of ancient aristocracy is taking form. The privilege of the few is becoming the rule of the many. Knowledge is being applied to life on a measure beyond the hopes of Plato, and the vision of his ideal state. In the upbringing of these children I could watch the foundation of a new society; the achievement of arid, unpleasing work and accumulation of detail; the spending of money collected after disputes, and in spite of the dulness and miserliness of comfortable men without imagination; the transmutation of life by health committees,

sanitary engineers, sewers, waterpipes, building rules, calculation of cubic spaces, vaccines, paving stones, schools; a new religion of the sun and the air. I knew well enough how little had been done. ("John the miller, that ground small, small, small.") I knew that most of these children were fated to come back from the future into the present. They will make their submission to the city; few will escape the ugliness of the suburban streets, houses of cheap material and ignoble design, commonplace and unsatisfying pleasures. But their own children, and their children's children, will take their place where a beginning has been made, where slowly—how slowly, the rivers and mountains are witness—the burden of living will become less heavy, and the inheritance of life more to be desired, in spite of the harshness of heaven and the inevitable decrees. *Hic locus urbis erit, requies ea certa laborum.*

And the books which I had come to interpret for myself? I saw them with their covers faded, their pages crumbling to dust, their sentences a forgotten idiom, their words blown on the wind.

IX

Once again I have crossed the boundary of Salisbury Plain, and driven south-westwards to the last of the chalk headlands of England. From here a man might walk eastwards over the chalk downs until he came to Winchester, or still further, to Canterbury and the highway to the Roman world; but if he went along the line of the coast towards Land's End, he would see the red earth cliffs until he came to Start Point, Bolt Head, and Rame Head, and the Cornish rocks by the open Atlantic. This border country has nothing of the economy of beauty, a spell-bound beauty, of north and south Cornwall; the secret traditions of an earlier time have less part in the combes and woods and high hedges. Yet something of the ultimate silence and deep unnamed virtues have taken form here, and touched this Virgilian richness with a memory not its own. The sound of the sea, near or distant, according to wind and tide, but rising always during the night, this universal sound,

this intermingling of unravelled music, bears the sign and compulsion of lunar and stellar rhythm; the sound of the sea which levels in the mind before its alternation of ebb and flow even the Andean and Himalayan heights.

Yet in this valley it is easy to forget the limits of the world, and unending space and time. Steep-sided hills and little fields reach down to the shingle of the beach, carrying to the edge of the waste the foliage and fruits and flowers of the land: as men ride bravely to death, wearing gay colours and speaking in simple words of the time of day, and the days they will never know. On one side of the valley the fields are bounded by a hanging wood, and on the other side, by old quarries overgrown with thorn and gorse and bracken. From my house at the end of the combe, where three tributaries join the main stream—a stream never more than five feet wide—the trees hide the level of the shore, and the irregular pattern of the hedges runs suddenly into the sea and sky. Most of the village is folded away in the valleys to the right and left. I can see a few houses: a farm with its outbuildings: three labourers'

cottages: a new villa built by a local architect from a copy-book example—harmless, and even "pretty." A square Victorian house halfway up the east side of the valley is hidden by trees. I imagine some Anglo-Indian merchant must have found this sheltered valley, and have been content to settle here half a century ago. At the end of the combe, where the stream is lost in the stony ridges of the beach, is set a group of coastguard cottages sixty or seventy years old: four chimney stacks above yellow-painted walls, and bold square windows. A mist is drifting up the valley, but I can mark the spear-like flagstaff and the angles of a roof squared like those houses I used to draw as a child.

For most of the day the sounds here are old sounds; the barking of dogs, the clacking of pails, chance talk or hammering in the village. Yesterday the hay was cut in two fields; now the men and horses and machines are gone, and the mown grass is changing colour under the damp sea-mist. A bee, more stupid than his kind, is trying to make his way out of the only unopened window in my room, and

buzzing angrily though he has but to bend his flight towards the open doors. Outside, above the rain-like sound of the aspen leaves, I can hear rooks, and wood pigeons, and the noisier sort of bird. I have but to listen for a moment, and I should distinguish the whole legion of little birds going loudly about their business. On certain days, and at certain hours each day (about the time of the feeding of the pigs!) the sea-birds fly inland, greedy for change of food and the plenty of the tilled fields. The manifold significance of things gives to these sea-birds the appearance of cavalry set out in order of attack by the leaders of a strange army; the outriders of Attila's host in a country which has long known the Roman peace. They bring back to my mind many of the troubled days of my life; the storms of childhood, and despair of body and mind: a pain which I would, and would not, forget. The flight of sea-birds has about it a timelessness which includes the beginning and end of all journeys: ships leaving harbour: ships laden with heavy cargoes: hulks moored in the recesses of land-locked gulfs and river-mouths. The sea-birds

circle above the boundary of the ocean floor which falls here to rise again under a tropical sun, or runs northwards and southwards to find the Arctic and Antarctic circles of polar light and cold and darkness. This sloping floor, strewn here and there with wrecks, covered with smooth, beribboned flowers, or falling to a desert of fine sand under a weight of water too deep for life, enforces its own scale of measurement and sets in a humbler cycle the changes of the land. Behind the ramparts which keep out eternity the intelligence of beasts and men work on the surface of the soil, bringing confusion and ugliness: but there is no steadfastness in this work. Men shift their objectives, and after they are gone, the slow procession of the seasons and the fecundity of plants and trees make another beauty. For those whose eyes are trained to know the traces of past history, there is evidence of the destructiveness of other generations in the unspoiled loveliness of any landscape: but over the sea there is nothing which does not belong to the "everlasting universe of things," a beauty whose only interpretation is surrender.

I have no part in the everlasting: I must turn landwards to the fields and hanging woods. Yet I have no right here to look for permanence; the shifting and subtle elements which make up this view will be dissolved again, and the pattern broken by the restlessness of human desire. It is my misfortune that I have come to this valley at the end of a long period of tranquillity and that I must accept the inevitable change, with little consolation in the thought that years after I am dead quiet and harmony may return here again. For ten years indeed I have been expecting change, knowing that beauty goes in a day. Steep hills, and narrow roads of approach, remoteness from towns and railways have been my allies. Nearly every other valley of the south coast has been invaded, and we are left unplundered.

This year the invasion—heralded by a few spies in summers past—has begun in full force. Below the coastguard cottages a line of huts can be hired for two shillings and sixpence a day, or ten shillings a week: a tea-house has been built, with a floor where western man

can dance to syncop..ted music. The farmer on the left of the combe has traced out a car park: sixpence a car—please pass on to the car park. Smart motor charabancs fill the lanes and tear the high hedges. The blacksmith near the church makes lucky horseshoes. The post office sells every kind of tinned tongue and beef and salmon for the campers who fill the great field above the beach. The valley is marked on the southern railway map: it is in glorious Devon, or the path of the sun, or what not. If I had a timelessness of judgment, I might laugh, as those in heaven spend their untroubled days of laughter, at this new enterprise and latest change. If the years of the star Sirius and the constellation of Orion moved far beneath me, as the clouds beneath Olympus, I should turn idly to the light of other suns, and never know the pain of those who can ill spare one summer out of their little store. Even here I may remember that a hundred years ago nearly every hill was quarried for stone and chalk, and that, above the woods and plantations, the whole crest-line, now grass-covered, was a jagged outline. The village inn is still called

"The Mason's Arms." Even from below, if you look closely, you see gaping hollows, and if you climb the hills, you cross roads, disused and overgrown, which were busy with traffic and loads of stone. They say that much of the stone for Exeter Cathedral was dug within two miles of this valley, carried by sea or by land, to be set in an order and proportion noble as any cliff or outline of sea-coast. Only within a hundred years the beauty which I have known has crowned these hills, bringing as it came ruin to quarrymen and a score of local trades and businesses. In another hundred years this new migration of townspeople will have spent its force: who knows what new beauty will come, with tranquillity, and, it may be, a new order of living and new dignity for the common man?

It is easy enough to believe that man tortures nature and despoils the patient earth: that ugly buildings offend the sunlight and the vault of heaven. Yet the pitifulness is in man himself, in his enjoyments and restlessness and half-understood reversion to older forms of life. The hills can afford to wait. Their enemy

is not man, but the levelling done by streams that hollow their way seawards. As for the sea, all the foulness of the world can be cleansed in its oceans. Fleet after fleet can ride unnoticed on its surface, spreading vulgarity and commonplaceness within a narrow range. Now and then some iceberg, sightless and dead, driven by wind and tide, may make a sudden end; but the sea is so much older than the purposes of men, and, for all the mythologies, knows not, nor feels, the weight of the tiny burdens set upon it for a short time. Yet men flatter themselves even in the hour of their unnoticed destruction, and come to their last days with self-important visions of judgment and a record of their deeds. When they take thought of their acts they are humble enough: with pride and humility they invite themselves as guests to the tables of Heaven. They take the lowest places, and are ready to serve their high hosts. They learn the rules which they believe to be the courtesy of the gods, and speak the language of immortality. Their company has pleased none of the immortals; their service is never taken; their pride and their humbleness are

wasted; their god-like speech, their heavenly rules are mocked by every other living thing. I have watched with anger enough this slighting of sacrifice, and felt the heat of shame that such generosity and simpleness of mind should meet with no answer, and that man's name of God should itself be swept round in the flight of change, caught up and carried with old skulls and the leaf-mould of primaeval forests in the blind rotation of the earth.

There is a church near the head of this valley. It is set in a sloping field, a little below the road; its builders found the stone near at hand. They designed a central tower, with transepts to the west, and a chancel and altar to the east. Above the altar the men of the fifteenth century made a new window of very noble tracery, giving light to the whole church. You see this window nearly half a mile away, as you follow the road westwards. The church is the last sign visible here of mediaeval England. For many centuries a priest at the high altar under this window, or at the side altars in the transepts, used every day the words of imperial Latin in re-enaction of the sacrifice of the

Cross. The miracle of the Mass was accepted, for fear or hope, for quiet or trouble of mind. Then came an age when this whole order of sacrifice and incarnation, oblation and forgiveness was overthrown; yet so strong was its compulsion that fragments of it, like the fragments of a broken star, survived the shock of mental discovery and economic change. The church itself, unaltered in outline since Tudor times, is now grey with many years, and has taken the winter colours of the surrounding woods. The English used in the prayers is as solemn and unusual as the Latin which it has displaced; a table is still spread humbly before God, and men are given little rules for the greatness of their desires. A few hundred yards away, hidden from the church by a turn in the valley, is a Methodist chapel: an historical accident, the outcome of motives oddly mixed; fear of God and envy of man; fear of oneself, and the uprush of passion and instinct; obedience to rule, and independence of priests. Near to this end of the valley there is a later accident of history: a vicarage built some fifty years ago in the imitative Gothic style; a house

of some dignity, befitting the social status of the Victorian clergy and their wives. Here is a reasonable compromise between the fitfulness of carnal lusts and the mystic marriage of Christ and the church; a compromise which took sensible account of property. When this house for the priest and the priest's wife was built, the labourers' cottages were even less cared for than they are to-day; yet without thought of irony the gospels were embodied in lawyers' parchment, and the religion of poverty and surrender and watchfulness for the judgment day mediatised through ecclesiastical commissioners, transformed into a security of tenure, and a comfortable benefice.

Upon what complications, reaching back to the remote hours of human terror before unknown and jealous powers, does this priest's livelihood rest? If the parchments were burned in one of the secular revolts against the dead hand of property, would the priest establish himself again? Is there no end to the procession of medicine men, witch doctors, weavers of spells, masters of rain, prophets and prophetesses of runes and oracles, augurs of good and evil fortune?

For six days now I have seen evening and morning; I have been carried round from light to darkness and through darkness across a maze of stars to the renewed brightness of the sun. The detachment of my life here leaves me free to watch the crystalline hour between sunset and night, and the transmutation of colours under the moon. I read my books: four volumes of Schiemann's *Geschichte Russlands unter Kaiser Nicholaus I.* I have nothing to do with the ordinary business of the valley. I know some of the villagers by name: I have heard most of the talk and histories of the place. One consequence of this detachment is that my reading merges subtly into the passage of time, and that I see the Russian history of a hundred years ago rising slowly to the eye just as on these shelving Dorset beaches the stony sea-floor rises to the surface under a limpid glass-green light, a cold distorting mirror. Schiemann's book is centred upon the family of the Romanoffs: a doomed family, unable to master their own passions, unable to give form to their own good will, powerless to overcome the lonely magnificence of their power. There is a

background of soldiers and peasants, at the mercy of violent and cruel men, bound to hard work and death in an unkindly soil: league upon league of forest and marsh and open plain. It is hard to think in these clear-cut dissimilar valleys bordering the Atlantic seaboard, that to each peasant in Russia his own village has a thousand little differences from every other village, or to understand the numbing, anxious isolation of the long terms of conscription or military campaigns undertaken with recklessness of life. I remember that I have only seen a curious shadow of Russia, as a man might see the genius of England in Malta or Gibraltar. I have known a Russian military camp in Macedonia, and I have stayed in the great Russian monastery of St. Pantaleeimon on the peninsula of Mount Athos. This monastery was almost a small town: the guest rooms were furnished in the old-fashioned Russian style with pictures and ikons. I heard music strange to my ears, though I knew well enough the psalms which were being sung. There was a hall of reception, hung with pictures of the tsars and magnates of the Russian Empire.

Almost at the time when the last tsar and tsarina and their children were murdered I listened to the state prayers for the house of Romanoff. These things have left in my mind a memory of domes and jewelled pictures: the monotony of green forests and moving boughs: a continual, fruitless search after a truth which is not to be found by murmurings and iteration and fear. In England this memory itself seems unreal. Here is business, enterprise, efficiency: a tempered variety of days; an acceptance of standards acquired through centuries of political experiment; authority controlled from below, and freedom from arbitrary rule and administrative injustice. Nothing seems further from the Byzantine chants, and old Slavonic words of the liturgy: from an art and music shaped like a pattern on an immense boundary wall: a government immersed in masses of verbiage and theories misunderstood and misapplied; men who contemplate the ruin of the day when night comes, and at sunrise think only of the darkness.

Yet every morning, before I begin to read, I

walk up the valley to a turn in the road, where a few cottages are clustered together on the upper slope of the hill. Below me the valley falls steeply to a meeting-place of streams. Here every summer day for five years and more I have noticed an old man, leaning against the railings at the roadside, or sitting in a high-backed chair. He is always looking over the water-meadows towards the great east window of the church, the graveyard, and the semicircle of trees enclosing the fountain head of the brook which has made this valley. I do not know this man's name, nor anything of his history: nor can I even guess why he stands or sits here, day after day, always looking towards the church. Sometimes he says a word or two to me, and I to him in answer. Then I turn back, and leave him there. Each year he is a little more bent, and his eyes a little older. But here is the world of those Russian poets, and an interpretation which I had limited to a foreign tongue, and the harshness of summer and winter in the plains of eastern Europe.

X

I WENT in a ship from London to Egypt, from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, from the Mediterranean to the Nile; a curious journey against the current of time, towards the sunrise, and the beginnings of history. My ship sailed in December, passing the Straits of Dover on a wild night with the winds streaming, unloosened. On the next day I saw the Isle of Portland take shape suddenly out of the mist, swinging like a pendant of emerald as the ship tossed and rolled on the sea. Then the curtain of mist was drawn again: the limits of the horizon were set by rain-clouds, and the green and white-crested waves. The wind from the south-west gathered its strength, and became the figure of some cosmic power, impersonal and adamantine as the movement of the stars. One could find the colour of steel in this wind that in the enforcement of its loud caprice and violence drove down the wave crests and cut off the curved petals and broken segments of water. I thought

of an invisible army of bowmen straining to the utmost tension the wood of their bows; rain falling obliquely like the last flight of arrows at Senlac. Every moment of the storm had this sense of achievement and victory; for above the noise of water there sounded the beat and rhythm of the ship's engines, a concentration of energy like the power of the will in moments of fear, like the triumph of fear mastered, and an even pulse against death. This excitement was the greater because of the nearness of the land. I knew that northwards beyond the haze of clouds were the broken combes and cliffs of Lyme Bay. Only a score of miles away the rainfall was soft to the touch, dripping from the lower branches down to the floor of the beech woods. I knew of houses and barns where the rain was cunningly diverted into trickling gutters and waterbutts, fat peaceful barrels where the storm was distilled into silence. Many a time had I looked out seawards from some sheltered valley, listened to the trouble of the air, and felt impatience that I was only on the borderland. At last I was in the very crucible of hail

and rain; I was crossing the long wind-ploughed furrows, unharvested, unsown. Here I could watch whole fields of ocean as far as the eye could see and the mists were open, moving to the view like the woods which came to Dunsinane; here was the magnificence and compulsion of great music, a fierceness of the mind, images which would come back to me in my old age; here was the universe in which my separate energy, my particular self would find everlasting fruition.

There were three nights and days of storm; on the third day the waves moved more slowly across the ship's path, at first in ridges like the limestone heights of the Jura after the high Alps, then rounded and smooth as the downs of southern England. The wind fell almost to silence; the beat of the engines lost the wildness of battle, and was no more than the uneventful throbbing of the pulse in sleep, or the well-directed business of a peaceful town.

At sunset the ship rounded Cape St. Vincent, and I saw the land and sea and sky lit with clear colours of fire and jewels. I remembered how often men had seen this headland burn

with the beauty of the path of light eastwards from the sea; how they had found words to describe this beauty, and how the memory of this path of light may have come to them as they died. They were long dead, while I in my turn was at the height of a vision, renewing the sequence of the generations who had come in ships from the north.

The ship was turned to the south-east, and through the night the noise of the water sounded very softly, like rain in summer nourishing the leaves. The sound was unchanging in tone, yet full of infinite and tiny variations; the sound of water unbroken since the beginning of life; this sound had struck on strangely-shaped ears of sea monsters before men had learned to sail in ships; crude and unsubtle brains would register the sound after the last skull of man on the sea-floor was changed unrecognisably, until the emptying of the treasure-house of the sun.

Within the boundaries of the Mediterranean the ship moved through a quiet sea, leaving a track of foam and trouble on the even surface. After sunset and under the moon the curved

waves, lifted ever so little, took the likeness of mother-of-pearl, and showed the flash and suggestion of lunar rainbows. The crest of the wave, which rose steeply, and as steeply fell away, from the thrust of the steel plates, shone a fine and luminous white, reflecting as in a dream the brightness of the sun in the Gulf of Mexico, many leagues beyond the ship's wake and the hiss of the thousand thousand air bubbles in the trough of its passage.

One night as I watched this movement, I talked with an airman about the flight of birds; how south of the equator, and the limit of the Tropic of Capricorn one might watch an albatross following with heavy, ceaseless beat of wings the set course of the ship; one might go to rest or to work, and look again after many hours at this flight of the albatross. Such a bird might fly over a quarter of the world, from Australasia to Cape Horn, knowing no cessation of movement, flying through the night as a man breathes in dreamless, animal sleep. Here in this inland sea there is less royal force among the seagulls; they lag behind to rest on the water, or set themselves adroitly in the

down draught of air near the ship's bows, and share in the velocity of the propellers and the engines. Yet they make a curious pattern as they fly, a pattern not unlike the arrangement of letters and words in a manuscript carefully written; whole sentences of a language as remote as the coloured threads of the Incas from the intricacy of our own Latin or Gothic type; an exposition of fate as men once thought who practised divination and the interpretation of auguries and lots.

I found the oddest contrast between this ancient sound of water, this loveliness of sunlight and sky, the order of the sea-birds in flight, and, on the ship, the chatter, the coming and going of the passengers. For them the voyage must be made as like as possible to the routine of the land. In hotels among the Alps one finds this same contrast, a greater aimlessness indeed at the journey's end. The hotels in the mountains have nothing of the lines and utility of a ship; the work of the hotel servants little of the dignity, the accuracy and mastery of the control of the ship. But it is easy in the mountains to leave the banality of talk and forget the

staleness of unused leisure. Here on the sea the hotel is the one constant element in the changes of hours and days. The hotel moves through the ocean, and along the shores of kingdoms; islands appear on the horizon, take their full shape, and sink down again eastwards or westwards below the field of sight. The state-rooms of the ship are a curious make-believe within the linked and intricate machines; in these rooms, or on tiered decks suggestive of the Mappin terraces in Regent's Park, men and women chaffer away in small change their infinity of time.

A week ago they were a fussed crowd of strangers, eyeing each other with the practised suspicion of the jungle and the cave. Some talked at once, others waited for a chance moment, looking warily for proof of common acquaintance or a common knowledge of everyday things and places. After a time little habits were made. The same groups met at the same hour, and spoke in different words the same comments about the day. Before a week was out a whole society was formed; one could have analysed the reasons why men come

together in states and make laws and associations and alliances. At first there seemed no interest in most of these commonplace, unheroic faces. Yet very soon I could have observed enough incident to fill a thousand books, though ten thousand books have been written about these chance meetings. One could have rewritten Thackeray's *Book of Snobs*, Theophrastus' *Characters*, Aesop's *Fables*, Gulliver's *Travels*, and the whole *Corpus* of political satire. Out of a scrutiny of this shipload, one could have gathered again the crowd which climbed the hill of Crucifixion; pieced together the story of the crusades, invented the theory of a class war.

I saw also the mercilessness of heaven. I sat at a table with an Eurasian woman and two children; mother and daughters. The mother had given up the fight against time, and allowed her life to ebb away with her youth. She was nervous, over-dressed, weak and unmeasured in talk, sad with the inevitable change in her animal life, pitifully dependent upon the charity of others, upon affection paid as a tribute to memory. The daughters had

ten or twelve years of life in front of them before they too would lose their power of attraction and fulfilment of being. They were timorous and at the same time childishly arch in speech and gesture; conscious of their isolation between two races, frightened at the barriers of northern restraint, born for dancing and music and feasting while their eyes still held the bloom and delicacy of wings. One day a wireless message came to them that their father was dead. The message was brought to the elder daughter. She showed me the telegraph form: the address, the date, the message, the sender's name, all written neatly enough by the ship's wireless operator. For two days the children dared not tell their mother. After these two days I left the ship; I had watched the cheating of death for forty-eight hours. I could see the little attentions which the children paid to their mother. They begged me to be "cheerful," to tell stories, to pass the time quickly, to hide any knowledge of calamity. Never before had they been brought against the suddenness of death; yet they fenced and fought against misfortune,

they steeled themselves against fate as though they possessed some ancient wisdom and knew all the secret armoury of life. Their father's death meant to them something in relation to their mother that no western mind could follow to conclusion. Soon they would have to tell her that the last image of her youth was gone, that she was alone, without place or portion. I thought of ruined houses, of fields left to the yellow weeds, instruments which had served their purpose, tools flung aside as blunted. With foreknowledge of her misery they gave her two more days of life; yet I could not but wonder whether she saw through their artifice, guessed the sentence which they were hiding, and played a part even more skilfully in order that she too might gain strength of instinct and resource of life to meet this capital decree. As time went on, I began to see this ship driving its course on the sea just as the earth moves one among a system of planets, bearing a burden pitiful enough in the immensity of the universe. A ship is sunk, a world is broken into fragments; the sea closes over the wreckage, the debris of a star is scattered through the

void. . . . *Ecce, Deus excelsus in fortitudine sua: quis poterit scrutari vias ejus? aut quis potest ei dicere: Operatus es iniquitatem?*

At night there was music of the negro kind played for these passengers; vacant sounds, droned from instruments which could never make the notes which have stirred men to battle, or ennobled the reality of death. A foolish, crooning cacophony mixing with the noise and silence of the sea. They were an odd cargo-load, these passengers written down as so many "souls" in the bills of lading. . . . Apes, and peacocks: screeching, strutting, huddled, timid, freakishly playful; apes subtly on their guard even while they played, narrowly watching the lurking masters of good and evil; doomed to fear their own vague memories of high trees and interlaced branches, and to find shame in the flashes of petals which drifted before their eyes. The peacocks flared idly from morning until dark, and under the feigned lights of the night-time; a wasteful idleness, without power of flight, without violence or desire of achievement, dully reproducing their kind; so much splendour of colour

and beauty of pattern for this blind path of life. I left the ship for a few hours at Naples, and went from this Tyrian burden to the fragments and debris of the Roman world. Street after street at Pompeii, empty and echoing like the ruined streets of Ypres fourteen years ago, strengthened the belief in the inevitableness of the end of the Roman world. The framework of this civilisation was massive enough; there was a quickness of thought, and at times a nobility unknown to the barbarians for five Christian centuries and more. One of the last Roman poets of the west saw Capri as a monastery: *squalet lucifugis insula plena viris*. Neither Rutilius Namatianus nor any of his contemporaries long after Pompeii was buried under the choking volcanic ashes could understand the change which was coming over their Mediterranean world. No one could have foreseen the naïf and fierce confidence of the Middle Ages, a certainty of the future unshaken by the disillusionments of history; a fear for the last things although already in the Roman catacombs corruption had fallen into dust these thousand years.

The Roman world had not run its course in the year A.D. 79; in some measure the later empire learned a tolerance which was soon to be lost again from the maxims of rulers. . . . *Uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum.* . . . Yet I thought that I could see in Pompeii many of the signs of barrenness which preceded the fall of the western empire. A sameness and uniformity of decoration; recurrence of outworn motives in painting and architecture. More obvious was the evidence of economic weakness. Within this closed circle of life, and under these conventions and standards there seemed to have been little chance of accumulating the capital necessary for great productive work. Trade was limited by narrow streets in which two wagons could not pass; no provision was made for a growing population, new industries, the expansion of business. There was stability, and an understanding of the fineness of things, without practical submission to the laws of the world, or curiosity which would be content to measure and weigh, to classify, observe, and yield to the necessities of living. For this reason the Roman

mind never obtained lasting control of the material in which it worked. A few devices were enough; the old tools, the old weapons served for century after century. Disease and pestilence were accepted as inevitable; the sword might be changed for the bow; tactics might be altered, but still the barbarians were fought with arms hardly more powerful than their own. Cheapness of slaves, corruption of government, facility of women, the idleness and false standards of a ruling order; concentration of wealth; invention and discovery held in low esteem, exhaustion of the soil; barrenness of metaphysical speculation; timidity of priests; I could name a hundred instruments of the Roman fate. Nevertheless as my ship coasted along the Italian shore, I thought of the great days before the decline and end; I wished that I could have seen the straight roads to Beneventum and Sicily; little maniples of soldiers marching under the winter sun, their bronzed knees moving to the quick step, their javelins and short swords catching the sunlight. They would pass milestones and tombs; emblems of the gods and of the fertility

of the fields and the tillers of the fields; ox-carts and wine-jars, high fluted columns, arched viaducts. The peasants would be gathering acorns and olives, laurel and myrtle, netting and trapping the wild creatures, or enjoying the fruits of summer in idleness.[1]

But I was bound to turn eastwards, and to come under the sovereignty of one river. In England, determined by its surrounding tidal seas and warm ocean currents, I had never understood the monarchical rule of the Nile. The course of the river which once dominated northern Europe is now sunk below the level of the sea, and a score of streams divide the mastery of water. But in Egypt, inland from the Delta, and away from the rainfall of the Mediterranean, the sun is for many months of the year an enemy, and fertility is bestowed by the waters of a single stream. For the green-

[1] *. . . hiems ignava colono:*
frigoribus parto agricolae plerumque fruuntur
mutuaque inter se laeti convivia curant.
invitat genialis hiems curasque resolvit,
ceu pressae cum jam portum tetigere carinae
puppibus et laeti nautae imposuere coronas.
sed tamen et quernas glandes tum stringere tempus
et lauri bacas, oleamque cruentaque myrta;
tum gruibus pedicas et retia ponere cervis
auritosque sequi lepores. . . .

ness of the fields, the nurture of men and animals the Nile brings melted snows of Abyssinia, tropical rains of central Africa and the "mountains of the moon." The Nile flows for three thousand miles and more, now as a torrent, now sluggishly through wide swamps lit by myriads of fireflies, now bearing on its surface white and crimson and blue water-lilies, The colour of its waters is changed in their journey. The river crosses the Nubian desert, and falls more rapidly into the long valleys of Upper and Lower Egypt. Here the Nile is more than the giver of food. The rudiments of knowledge were born of the compulsion of its rise and fall. In Egypt, as in Babylon to the north-east across the Arabian and Mesopotamian deserts, those who lived by the great rivers learned the measurement of land and practised the art of writing: for they had to record boundaries lost every year in the featureless plain after the flooding of the waters. Here also men watched the movements of the stars that by calculation they might know the time of the coming of the flood. They built themselves ships; they moved stones for building; they grew crops by the

fertile bank; they amassed property, and took upon themselves the habits of settled life. They made weapons and devised tactics and formations of war, that they might defend their rich inheritance, or in their pride and superiority of possession multiply the sources of their wealth, and take women and slaves. Never before had I seen the conditions of men's advancement reduced to such simple terms; the northward path of water between snow peaks and the sea. Moreover I saw the evil which has befallen men in the invention of kings to rule and gods to be feared. The peasantry at work on the soil, a laborious population of busy fields, had little enough share in the abundance created by the labour of their hands. For generation after generation, while new princes came to the palaces, new gods to the temples of Egypt, while a new language displaced the earlier words, and new races conquered the cities, the men who worked in the fields had worked always for masters, and had eaten sparingly enough of this age-long succession of harvests. As for the fear of heaven, in this country of light, no

houses were as lasting as the tombs. I saw, as thousands have seen, the furniture of one such tomb. A profusion of gold; chased helmets and death-masks of gold, wings set in lapis lazuli; golden images of protection, golden thrones and canopies, wheels and chariots for a journey, ships built for a voyage darkly imagined; crowns and circlets of hammered gold, and all manner of delicate implements: these were a part only of a treasure buried in darkness for the embellishment of a tomb, and the ease and luxury of a corpse, heaped together in a sealed chamber which was held to be the gate of immortality. The prince for whom these things were made died as a young man: the whole equipment of life everlasting could not have been made ready for him in the royal and hieratic workshops. The priests hid with his coffin some of the ornaments of his palaces. One of these—or so it appeared—was a river-boat of alabaster, high-prowed, and set on a pedestal to rise above the fruits and spices and garlands of a feast. There were two figures of women on the ship. They made a contrast which seemed strange in this formal

and impersonal art; the contrast of gentleness and cruelty. In the bows of the ship was a girl, well-shapen, and free of limb; her head was set proudly, her eyes full of life and the joy of the senses. She held a wine-cup between her two breasts. Here were the desires of the body, the pleasures of feasting, the mastery of youth, and the compulsion of beauty. But in the stern of the ship, and more dreadful for the clearness of the carved alabaster, was a woman dwarf, horrible in her nakedness, obscene in the curve of her legs, the fatness of her buttocks, the sensitive, leering anger of her face. Yet I was bound to notice in this foiled and diseased creature, turning her eyes from the light, a fine enough setting for the litheness, the softness, the agility of the young girl in the prow. I found the same mingling of baseness and nobility in the figures of gods and goddesses. Anubis and Bastet, Sakhmet and Thoth, with the bodies of men and women that they might use the lusts of men and women; the heads of animals that they might not be vexed by delicacy of reflection, that no divine mercy might temper their power and keep back the

fury of their blood. Yet there were four figures of tutelary goddesses with arms outstretched, keeping a selfless and unwearying watch round the body of the king. I could not but think of the description of death in a modern kingdom. . . . *Un officier publique vient constater la mort. Il déclare qu'appelé en tel lieu il y a vu un cadavre; on écrit sur un registre le nom du décédé; deux fossoyeurs font le reste.* Four thousand years only, a time unnoticed in Orion, scarcely to be remembered in the measurements of the distant stars, four thousand years divide us from the making of this tomb, and the setting of the four goddesses round the inner shrine; the coming and going of hope and fear cannot be reckoned in terms of the equinoxes and the orbit of the sun.

Wandering among these ritual carvings and shapes of stone and gold and wood, I came upon two bouquets of flowers of the time of the twentieth Egyptian dynasty. Five hundred years before Marathon these flowers had opened; these leaves had rustled in the night wind of a hundred generations ago. Never before had I seen leaves of myrtle belonging

to this older world. I knew the duration of the physical universe, the secular age of the seas and oceans, the slow levelling of the mountains; yet I had never felt with such suddenness the sting of death which takes from us the procession of the seasons; the immensity of our loss when our few months of spring are set against the uncounted renewal of the years. I could understand the anger with which the kings of Upper and Lower Egypt fought against their mortality.

They achieved little enough for themselves in this insistence upon their own survival, and direction of their power towards the security of their tombs. Their monuments built as houses of life for the dead have long lost their meaning. The solidity of these houses was made to serve a life of shadows; their massiveness was fashioned as a home for discoloured bodies wrapped and encumbered in grave clothes; the bruised shell of the body with heart and entrails set apart, the directing brain scraped out by sharp hooks, limbs stuck fast in immobility by lewd embalmers. Yet even with this mockery of divine life the kings of the north

and south, their queens, their officers of state, their priests—sharing a filthy incorruptibleness with the bodies of bulls and cats—never escaped the crudest fears of the violation of tombs, the revenge of enemies, the callousness of robbers. It is difficult to guess the torments they may have undergone in their last hours through the knowledge that their immortality hung on the merest chance, and that the death against which they had protected themselves with such care might come to them through the most sordid and irrelevant accident. Pious hands well rewarded might lock the body furtively in hidden recesses and cheat the eyes of robbers by devices of nooks and crannies or the false lure of a trail of gold: but what hope was there of safety when thieves tearing the piteous face to steal a gold mask might cast the shadow of annihilation into the other world. The priests themselves could not be trusted. The tomb of the mother of Cheops was rifled in Cheops' own lifetime. The priests dared not tell the truth; they devised the pomp of a mock funeral, an empty coffin, a new tomb. The name of Akhenaten was blotted

out by priests jealous for the old traditions and orthodoxy. These priests were no common robbers; they left the gold and lapis lazuli, the jumbled furniture of the tomb; an empty storehouse, if by the destruction of the king's sacred name the priestly power might outreach "the flaming ramparts of the world." Akhenaten would then be the merest dust, and his heart a broken piece of clockwork, steeped to no purpose in the potent drugs, his limbs kept in vain from putrefaction; his ultimate death a vengeance and a warning to those who might question the ancient formulae.

Generation after generation of thieves profaned the houses of these deified kings; the first-comers might be content with the wealth nearest to hand; the last were driven to the utmost sacrilege. Even the accidents of the elements, the wind and the life-giving air, might mean the destruction of the trappings and paraphernalia of the dead; the kings might be left propertyless and without resource or dignity among the immortals. Their identity which had filled the valley of the Nile from the cataracts to the sea would now be merged into the impersonal

universe; their broken coffins would lie as empty as a pyx hanging in a rich man's house. The solemnity of the tombs was lost centuries ago. Even before the monuments of Rome were built tourists came to the holy tombs of Saqqara, and left record of a pleasant day, a picnic on the borders of the desert, a relief to jaded nerves, the glamour of antiquity.

On the other hand in this childhood of architecture the tombs were given a completeness of form, which few other buildings hold merely in their shape. There can be no weariness in looking at the simplicity of line, the closed boundaries of these pyramids; the symmetry of the four sides, the finality of the apex. These works have the perfection of crystals and appear as a matrix of architectural design; the basic rhythm of space, as the beat of the heart and all tidal secular movements make up the rhythm of time. This achievement of kings who used the lives of countless slaves and impressed serfs to build their pyramids would seem itself to have been a matter of chance. Egyptian builders and artists rarely looked for beauty. Massiveness, durability, the satisfaction of

ritual needs, the perpetuation of the religious purpose were ends in themselves. The craftsmen set to make furniture for the tombs could have no thought of fame. Their best work would be lost in darkness; even if the power of magic could transmute these earthly pieces into the very substance of the kingdom of Osiris, the name of the maker would be lost. Moreover in most of the later work the pattern was given; the execution was impersonal, without consciousness of art, without reflection; part of the duty and routine of living. Here and there temple workmen carved or painted scenes they had known from childhood; pictures of village life without hieratic significance. At these times there are signs of a careful, childlike, observance of nature, faithful even in the most conventionalised styles, and not seldom fired with the same tragic, transfused beauty which lights the eyes of domestic animals; a tranquillity of achievement, without the restlessness, the individuality, the self-assertion of the west. It is odd to remember that for a time this absorption of the artist in his work came back to the western world. It is found in the

Christian Middle Ages; it is brought to its finality in the painting of Fra Angelico. Then it disappears; who knows whether it may not come back in the cycle of future ages, after the excitement of discovery has worn away, and the world has again found a routine wherein men are no more than the links which bind a living chain?

A few weeks later, I took ship again at Port Said. As my ship lay at anchor in the narrow harbour between the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal on the north and south, the desert to east and west, I found among the living the contrasts which I had noticed with such vividness in the tombs of the dead; the contrast between the immediate purpose and the ultimate significance of the actions of living men and animals. I listened to the chattering of hawkers, eager to sell wares gaudily laid out in their small boats; I watched the sea-birds crying and squabbling over waste thrown out from the ship's kitchens, Arabs diving in the unclean water for coins thrown

to them by tourists. I saw the pattern made in the high air by the flight of kites, turning and hovering and swooping with slight movement of their long, narrow wings. The sight of these birds and men showing a perfection of physical skill and muscular response oddly disproportionate to the end in view led me back through certain ways in the mind to another moment of contrast and double significance; a transition from the circumference to the centre of the circle. On the carriage road above Grindelwald, over against the black, enormous masses of rock, a man sits on summer days by the side of a large horn. The horn is ugly enough, and made more hideous by the attachment of a megaphone or piece of twisted metal, like a broken cistern. As parties of tourists come within range, this man, grotesque, bull-necked, red-faced, leaves his stall of postcards and trinkets, and sounds a few notes roughly on the horn. The sound is harsh enough, made without subtlety, or sense of the range and potentialities of wind instruments. Suddenly this raucous noise is transmuted by echoes from the mountain walls. It

returns as exquisite music, the pervading sequence heard by shepherds with their flocks in the fields, whether in Bethlehem of Judaea, or in the mountains of Greece; it shares in the timelessness of the clear sky, the remoteness of the snowfields, the glaciers and pillars of ice; it might be the sound at last of the freeing of the serfs, a divine manumission, a prelude to the renewal of the world.

The sound dies away; a few pence clatter into the dish set by the postcard stall; the spoon-shaped horn, the bent and hammered mega-phone overhang the little pastures.

Then my ship sailed; the horizon opened to the sea and the wind scattering the clouds, leaving bare in heaven the element of fire; sunlight diffused through the air, and reflected back on water; the nakedness and fierceness of the visible universe. Out beyond the long breakwater which safeguards the harbour and the canal there was a choice of destiny. To the west were the Pillars of Hercules; to the east, Jerusalem.

XI

THE fear of death; I was thinking of the advance of the British line at Fontenoy, and the halt in front of the levelled muskets of the French. I remembered that before the French volley was let loose an English soldier raised a laugh by calling, "for what we are about to receive, Lord, make us truly thankful." To such schooling will the fear of death submit itself. No high philosophy is needed; no disdain of life, no reckoning of proportions, or foreknowledge that there is a time for sleep as there is a time for waking; no delicate curiosity of mind, neither love nor hate. The fear of death melts away before the simplest habitudes of living; men who are born to die may become familiar with the movements, obedient to the commands which will lead them assuredly to death. This death is Protean in its shapes and forms. Fear of its coming is never freed from other fears, though over the passive levels of the mind there may rise a tide of hope, a tranquil stream

bringing oblivion under the moon, and a good name.

A friendless man could hardly fear death; a man in grave illness, torn by the climbing and falling of pain, may long for death; dissolution is already present, and death comes, not as a great wind, scattering the gathered harvest of many years, but with gentleness, leading to unity the broken threads of living. Lust of revenge may quench the fear of death, and make a strange obverse to the passion of the body that finds quiet in the satiety of generation, fulfilment of self in the very process of life which must mean our own doom; for there is over-abundance of life, too loud a hiving of bees, too careless a song at dawn. To a child death must seem as dreaming, an answer to questions for which there are no words found.

The desire of fame may lull the fear of death, or burn in the heart like the poet's rose of the world, hiding all lesser desires and wrongs. Few men caring for dominion have taken account for themselves of death or the fear of it. These men who have shown mastery in the exercise of power have also learned to take

from others their fear of death. Napoleon cared little enough for the lives of soldiers, and could make evil jests at the sight of dead bodies on a battlefield: "More men of the 32nd? I thought they were all dead in Italy." Yet he knew the formulae to which simple men react; he made his calculations finely; no man, not even the divine Roman emperors, could be more cynical of loyalty. Yet Napoleon embodied in himself the legend and image of the Angel of Death, not merely in his destructiveness, but in the disposition of the territories which he conquered. Not only did he make Europe into a threshing-floor for his most bitter harvest: he turned the ways of life towards the path of death. His rule had the orderliness of a well-planned graveyard: under his breath the fruits of knowledge were frozen. Spontaneity, laughter, idleness, all the attributes of life, the torches which hide the surrounding darkness, were quenched and put out. Death of the mind was to precede death of the body; the death which takes men in the winking glaciers. Under their emerald light, and borne on their slow descent, the lines of the body are kept

unbroken; no worms are here to be fed. Hands blue-grey with cold, vitrified, unfrightened eyes, marbleness of face; yet is life gone.
Such was the pattern which Napoleon shaped out of man and the labour of men. Is there no other interpretation of life reaching beyond the extremity of human effort, nothing more than the metallic rocks, the stream of nebulous light, the movement of the air, the deadness and terrible beauty of the mountain tops? In such a case the offer of all the kingdoms of the world would be an offer of death; a mockery of dominion, the strength of coffin lids well nailed down, and a casket enclosing the heart.

The fear of death. Who thinks of this fear of death must remember the darkness of the Middle Ages: *ce cauchemar effroyable*, when the dogmatism and confusion of priests and crowds, the lowness and pity of Jerusalem in the week of the Passion, outlasted a thousand years. I have looked in the Middle Ages for those who escaped the fear of death. They knew to sail

into the wind, and acquired for their thought a power which they had not yet learned to use on oceans and seas visible. They explored the whole kingdom of death, found its secrets, made maps of its by-ways, and came back, long after their youth, to a tranquillity of heart, a familiarity with the movements of the dead and the elements of the universe which has put their work into a category unreached by modern men.

The prince and captain of these voyagers was Dante. He found the very rhythm of the unknown kingdom, and after deliberation, set in their place the processes of time and the laws to which obedience cannot be refused.

La forma general di Paradiso
Già tutta mio sguardo avea compresa,
In nulla parte ancor fermato fiso.

The Latin of the Mass is the language of these travellers' tales; a play acted not with masks hiding the faces of the actors and making their speech impersonal and lastingly significant, but staged with symbols ancient and as deep as words, accompanied by a murmur of sound penetrating between the branched columns

and arches of sentences and logical terms, and the long aisles of history. Yet this order set in the mediaeval world swept aside minor purposes, and assumed that the ends of men are the ends of death; that corruption is the portion of man; that the fear of death is too weak, too shallow to prepare men for the last terrors. The images of Virgin and Child took the graciousness with which men have tried to make time captive; the springtime of Daphnis and Chloe, and the flocks and herds. Nevertheless time and the hours pass, and the pains of childbirth follow the fulfilment of desire; the child grows to manhood, and again death and the fierceness of death come as near as in the hour of birth. Side by side with the Virgin and Child, the young corn, and the coming of spring, set vividly without synthesis or thought of reconciliation, is the image of a body pierced, broken, dead. In the hour of birth, the singing of angels, the guarding of flocks and herds, the kings led by a star; in the hour of death, nothing.

The fear of death; the hope of immortality. A procession of colours, like the seasons of the year, concealing a fecundity too swift in its succession of births for time and the round world, begins with the light of the first mists of life; these visions take form and hardness in armour of limbs and patterns inconceivable to gods of Olympus, jaws and throats and every contrivance of destruction. Then the leap of the flame of life; a division of experiment; here is a breeding-place for eyeless creatures in the dark mud; high in heaven eagles are let loose with eyes jewelled against the sun; here are serpents, sleek and like watch springs of some fearful mechanism. Here is food set ready for all; none shall go short of food, and to make food for all, all feel the lust of begetting, the joy and pain of bringing to birth. Here is the legion of parasites and animalculae, cleaving in their uncounted numbers to the entrails, attacking the tenderness of the brain, blind friends to uncleanness, living and dying and living, a knot inextricable in the chain of being. Here at last are men and women, a light not heretofore reflected under sun or

moon. I see children playing with stones and instruments of ivory in a world with no ruins of cities, no empires, neither laws nor writing, without knowledge of the melting and hammering of metal. I watch them scavenging for weapons among heaps of bones and skeletons and tusks piled up by the drift of rivers; I mark their homes scattered among wrecks of great trees or fossils old beyond memory. I know of the control of fire, the devising of wheels, the sharpening of swords, the raising of cairns and pylons and circles of power. I find skulls that held subtle calculations of mind, tumbled with sprawling limbs of beasts, and teeth which obeyed instinct undifferentiated. The knives grow sharper, and altars are set up. Those who made altars made gods. Here is new confusion; the hopes of immortality; dreams at noon, and waking from sleep beyond the hours of life and the withdrawal of the tide. This fissure of the world, this volcanic storm has filled the heaven with luminous dust and clouded with beauty the going down of the sun.

Silence is broken, and I hear many voices;

nor do I know whether God is a beginning or an unattainable end. God has as many forms as death, and the fear of God as the fear of death. Yet fear was born when life was born, before God was devised; devised or perceived; perceived or known; known or revealed: a shadow over the unharvested sea, or the sustaining pillar of the world. For many centuries now no act has been without a twofold meaning; no lovers alone and to themselves on the marriage bed; no flight of arrows, no drift of battle-smoke, no feast, no day under the dome of heaven without this duplicity and furtiveness. There is always a preparation and making ready of palaces and stir of soldiers and servants. Month after month I find myself at some posting station and junction of roads; men whose language I cannot understand are telling each other of the approach of one who has been long absent. This I have guessed from their looks, their climbing of the watch-tower staircases, the polishing of armour; bridles and bits and accoutrements set for the horses. I can but await this coming, without fear.

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